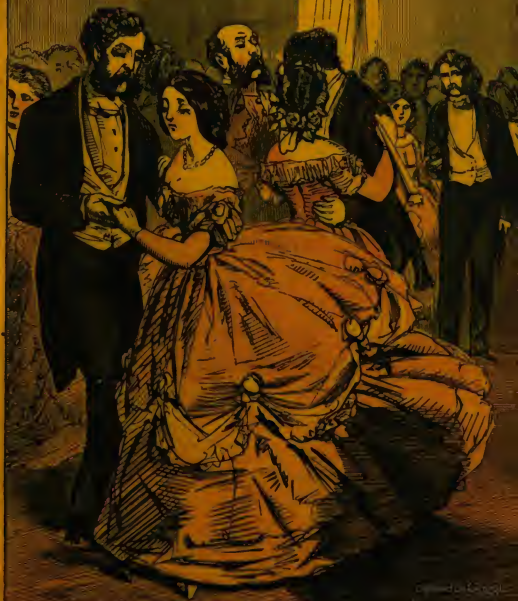


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THE SECRET OF A LIFE.

BY M.M. BELL.



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That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our friend."

WORDSWORTH.



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THE SECRET OF A LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

EGERTON PARK.

"Look how they come! a mingled crowd
Of bright and dark, but rapid days;
Beneath them, as a summer cloud,
The wide world changes as I gaze."

BRYANT.

It was principally owing to the exertions of the Egertons of Egerton Park that Heddlesham had risen from an insignificant village to its present proud position as a manufacturing town, returning its own member to parliament and greatly influencing the choice of the county member. The town was built on the Egerton estate. The river Eden, that wound so picturesquely through the pleasure-grounds of the park, was the same "water power" which turned the mill-wheels of the Heddlesham factories; it was therefore as natural that the Egertons should take a lively interest in the prosperity of the town, as that the townspeople should consider themselves privileged to discuss and pass judgment on the most private affairs of the Egertons.

For some years they had been deprived of this privilege owing to the early death of the late Mr. Egerton, and the removal of his infant son to be educated among his mother's relations in a distant county. But when Granville Egerton brought his newly married wife to the home of his ancestors, all Heddlesham received him with open arms, and was ready to give him credit for every good quality. At first he promised to be very popular. He was handsome, courteous, and well informed; a liberal in politics, a good landlord, a discerning magistrate; but, unluckily, he was also an indolent man, more inclined to live happily in domestic privacy than to mix himself up with local politics. And so

his popularity declined, although he was still much and deservedly respected; and when, after a few years of married life, his wife was snatched from him by sudden illness, all his neighbours sympathized with his bitter grief, and mourned sincerely for the loss of the young, fair creature whose unobtrusive goodness had endeared her to all with whom she came in contact.

"Awell! it is a sore trial," said one of the Heddlesham gossips to her neighbours when talking over the matter. "I fear it is fated that Granville Egerton is to be the last of his race. That poor infant can never live when deprived of her mother's care; and even if she do, it is only a girl. Yes, yes, the name of Egerton will die out with him."

"He will marry again, no doubt," suggested another of the party. "He is still young—under forty I should say; and you know the old saying, that the best proof a widower can give of his affection for his first wife is to provide her with a successor as soon as possible."

The first speaker shook her head doubtfully at so unfeeling a suggestion, but the idea was caught up with avidity, and it became a favourite subject of speculation among the Heddleshamites. The young ladies in the neighbourhood were frequently passed in review before the self-elected council, and their several qualifications for the vacant post were canvassed as keenly as if the decision of Heddlesham were likely to weigh with Mr. Egerton in his selection.

The general favourite among them all was Mary Vere, the only surviving sister of Mr. Egerton's ward, Sir Henry Vere. She was young, little more than twenty, while Mr. Egerton was considerably above thirty; but she was very staid and grave for her age, was a near relation and intimate friend of the late Mrs. Egerton, and was in every way fitted to make an admirable stepmother to little Ellen. Even Mrs. Fox and Mrs. Brudenell, the most severe dissectors of character among the Heddlesham gossips, acknowledged this; but said, with a laugh, that the match was so very suitable that it would never come to pass.

"I don't quite see that," said Mrs. Burns, the old lady who had bemoaned that Granville Egerton should be the last of his race. "You see, Mr. Egerton being a reserved

man, it is not likely he should seek a stranger in preference to a friend, if he does marry."

"H'm!" said Mrs. Brudenell; "reserved as he is, he takes more upon him at times than people who are much more in the eye of the world. For instance, he elected himself as Sir Henry Vere's guardian. That was an odd step for a shy man to take."

"Reserved men are not always shy," returned Mrs. Burns; "besides, the Veres are near connections of his wife's family. Indeed, failing little Ellen, Sir Henry is next heir to her grandmother, Mrs. Floyd."

"O yes! we have all heard of that, Mrs. Burns," rejoined Mrs. Brudenell, with a grin like a hyæna, that had no mirth in it. "Still, as the late baronet was no great friend of Granville Egerton's, I never for my part could understand why he chose to come so prominently forward on Sir Robert's death."

"There were reasons, ma'am," said Mrs. Burns, sententiously; "and that they were good ones is proved by the strong affection that subsists between the guardian and ward."

"I think I have heard," interposed Mrs. Fox, "that Mr. Egerton was with Sir Robert when he died?"

"He was, ma'am."

"How did he die? There was a mystery about it, was there not? I was not in Heddlesham at the time, but I think I heard there was a good deal of talk about it at the time. It did not happen at Vere Court, I think?"

"No, ma'am; Sir Robert was with his regiment at Chester at the time he met with his accident."

"Oh, it was an accident, then, that killed him?"

"Yes, ma'am, an accident."

"Then what had Mr. Egerton to do with it?"

"He came post haste to Vere Court to take Sir Henry and Miss Vere to attend their brother's death-bed."

Mrs. Brudenell moved restlessly in her chair while this colloquy went on, and said hastily, "Come, come, Mrs. Burns, it is no use to mince the matter, the *accident*, as you call it, was Granville Egerton's work; and if Mary Vere be the girl I believe her to be, she will never marry a man stained with her brother's blood."

"Mrs. Brudenell, you must not say that. If you knew all the circumstances you would—in short, ma'am you don't know the truth."

"Of course I don't; who does? It was all hushed up fast enough. Still I maintain that Mary Vere ought not marry Granville Egerton."

A dead silence followed this remark, but by-and-by people began to remember that Mrs. Burns had been so long governess at Vere Court, that she was likely to know the facts to which allusion had been made better than Mrs. Brudenell; and though the conclave broke up for the time being, it was resumed again and again, and each meeting seemed only to confirm the original idea, that Mr. Egerton ought to marry again, and that Mary Vere was the very person fitted to make him happy.

But years rolled on without his showing any marrying symptoms of affection for his late wife. His mother-in-law superintended his household; and he lived in complete retirement, seeing no one except Sir Henry Vere and Mrs. Dashwood, the widow of his nearest neighbour and most intimate friend.

A contested election first roused him from his apathy of grief. Heddlesham was desirous to have an Egerton once more to represent its inhabitants in parliament, and endeavoured to persuade him to stand for the borough. This he could not resolve to do; but he did exert himself so far as to suggest to the deputation that Sir Henry Vere was now of full age, and that so active and well-principled a young man would do more credit to Heddlesham as its representative than a hermit like himself.

The deputation hesitated—asked time for consideration; but in twenty-four hours Sir Henry was decided upon as the liberal candidate, and Mr. Egerton had consented to act as chairman of his committee.

Egerton Park was no longer shut up. Busy voices sounded through its chambers, hurried steps rang through its halls. The hermit life was broken in upon. Was it likely to be resumed after the bustle of the election was over? Before people had an opportunity of deciding on such a question, it was announced that Granville Egerton was going to be married.

"To Mary Vere?"

"No; to Charlotte Elton."

"Impossible! What inducement can he have to make a girl like that his wife?"

Alas! studious, reserved, and especially indolent men, are but sorry readers of human nature; they know little of women's real characters; and a bright, merry, laughing girl, especially if a stranger, is much more attractive to them than a really well-principled, deep-minded woman.

"Besides," as Mrs. Fox remarked, "men of that sort require to have all the trouble of courtship taken off their hands, and *that* Charlotte Elton was ready enough to do. Moreover, she is distantly connected with the Veres."

"And her having no near relatives is, I have no doubt, in her favour," suggested Mrs. Brudenell. "I am sure Granville Egerton was resolved to have no more mothers-in-law"—and she grinned her own peculiar grin: "Mrs. Floyd has satisfied him on that point."

"Is it true that he has never forgiven the old lady for trying to prevent his marriage with her daughter?"

"I have heard so; but, at all events, they are so far from cordial, that, as I before said, Miss Elton's want of relations is advantageous to her pretensions."

"Well, I never knew there was any want of cordiality between Mrs. Floyd and Mr. Egerton. His manner to her is all that is courteous and considerate."

"That courteous manner sometimes deceives the uninitiated," Mrs. Brudenell answered caustically. "Still, I confess, I myself should find it difficult to keep on terms with that irascible Welshwoman. I don't like the race; next to the Irish and Scotch, I hate the Welsh."

Poor Mrs. Floyd! Little did she think when struggling to treat the gossips of Heddlesham with due politeness that they viewed her in so uncharitable a light; and little did even Mrs. Brudenell guess why she had discouraged Mr. Egerton's attentions to her daughter; how nobly she had striven, when she found that Julia's happiness depended on her marriage to him, to overcome her own prepossessions against him; and what personal sacrifices she had made to come to him in his great sorrow, and, for his sake and the child's, desert her own fair home for one in every respect

uncongenial to her. For Mr. Egerton's own happiness, as well as for little Ellen's, she had desired he should marry again—had even joined with Mrs. Dashwood in urging it upon him as a duty; but when she was introduced to Miss Elton—when she found her precisely the good-natured, chattering, giggling girl she had heard her described—when she discovered that not the duties but the luxuries attendant on her new position were uppermost in her mind when she accepted Mr. Egerton—she bitterly regretted the “curse of a granted prayer,” and resolved that one so unfitted for the task should never be intrusted with the education of little Ellen. She would carry her off at once to Penmorfa. In the home where her mother had become the joy of all hearts, the delight of all eyes, Ellen should grow up to fill her vacant place. Amid the grand and glorious scenery of her own Welsh mountains she should be taught from childhood her rights, her privileges, and her duties, as the third heiress in succession of a long line of Celtic ancestors, and in the devotion of her own people forget her English prejudices, her English home, and her English stepmother.

Such were Mrs. Floyd's dreams the night after first seeing Charlotte Elton. A further acquaintance with her increased her desire for their fulfilment, but left her with few hopes of succeeding in the attempt. Nothing could be more charming than the young girl's petting of Ellen in her father's presence—nothing stronger than the expressions of love and devotion she made use of when speaking to him of the future; but those who saw behind the scenes felt that it was only surface affection—a means to an end.

However that might be, it was strongly established in Mr. Egerton's mind that dear Charlotte doted on Ellen, and would make her a most excellent stepmother; while Mrs. Dashwood earnestly advised Mrs. Floyd to relinquish her project, reminding her that it was still possible that Ellen should continue to be the heiress of Egerton Park as well as of Penmorfa, and that to remove her from the natural home in which Providence had placed her was an experiment which might be attended with evil effects, if not to herself, at all events to her stepmother and father.

Mrs. Floyd listened, but refused to be convinced by her friend's arguments; on the contrary, she took courage to

broach her plan to her son-in-law. He received it with a burst of indignation, declaring that nothing would ever induce him to allow his daughter to go to a place where Mrs. Floyd knew *he* could never again set his foot, and hinted that any further reference to the subject must cause an entire breach between them. Matters seemed likely to end in this uncomfortable way, when the bride elect came to Mrs. Floyd's assistance. With apparent kindness she pleaded "dear grandmamma's" cause against her own fond wishes, reminded Granville how sadly ignorant she was of children's wants and ways, and that for the few months after her marriage she should have her time so much broken in upon by other duties, that she might not have the leisure she wished to devote to the little darling. Besides, she could not but feel that Mrs. Floyd's wish was both natural and praiseworthy, and that everybody should pay as much deference as possible to what she desired.

Mr. Egerton called her a kind-hearted little puss, and yielding more to the fascination of her manner than to her arguments, reluctantly gave his consent to a short separation from his child.

"But I must have her home before Christmas; remember that, Charlotte."

"Of course, love; we could not spare our pet longer."

Mrs. Floyd smiled; Mrs. Dashwood shook her head; and thirteen Christmases passed over all before Ellen Egerton was again taught to consider Egerton Park her home.

Thirteen years! Was it possible that Mr. Egerton had allowed himself to be so long estranged from his motherless child. He had not submitted without a struggle. Every visit Ellen paid to the Park, made him resolve that she should never leave home again; but in the end he always allowed her to return to her grandmother, though how the result was attained those only can explain who have seen how clever, right-thinking men learn to give up their own will to the guidance of silly, cunning wives. It is difficult to understand how this influence gradually gains ground; but that it does so is an acknowledged fact. Men suffer more even than women do from the moral atmosphere in which they live; and, if they chance to be of an indolent temperament, will do anything for a quiet life. Thus they

often endure known evils rather than encounter the unknown, more especially when an attempt to rid themselves of them entails exposure to the rancour of a woman's tongue, to the outburst of unfeminine rage, or to the almost more wearing annoyance of that fretting and worrying, which, like the constant dropping of water on rock, wears out the heart, the health, the temper.

It was not very long after his second marriage that Granville Egerton made the uncomfortable discovery that his wife was totally unsuited to him in every way. Her girlish vivacity palled upon him when he found by experience that it originated in the excitement of society, not in a naturally cheerful disposition, and that her good-nature was not proof against the little trials which arise even in the happiest of married lives. The pretty petulance of the *fiancée* soon degenerated into provoking wilfulness in the wife; and many were the quarrels that took place in consequence of her silliness and obstinacy—the two qualities generally go together—during the first year of matrimony. Whatever other failings Granville Egerton had, he was at all events a gentleman; and these petty domestic squabbles were very distressing to him. They caused him deep mortification as a husband, they hurt his taste as a man, and they degraded him in his own eyes as a reasonable being. Above all, they tried him, by exciting the violence of a temper which he knew was dangerous when roused, for to the fatal effects of his uncontrolled passion he owed some of the bitterest moments of his life. Still he could not submit to have his wife the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood; he must interfere sometimes. Yes, he must; but he did it rarely, wisely arguing with himself that constant interference would do no good, and that the only way to make himself at all comfortable in every-day life, was to let his wife follow her own devices, so long as they kept within the bounds of propriety. If they threatened to go beyond that he must make a stand; and he followed out this course so consistently, that Mrs. Egerton learned at last that when Granville said so and so was to be, it must be; for even she had sense enough to give in sometimes. She had once seen him in a passion, and she never forgot it.

Her husband had hoped that when Charlotte had chil-

dren around her she would become more staid and fond of home ; but, unluckily, she had only one daughter, and she was treated so entirely as a plaything that, giving up all further expectation of improvement, Mr. Egerton philosophically relinquished the attempt to seek a companion in his wife. He must be content to have a mere well-dressed doll as the mistress of his house and the mother of his little Kate ; and after a time he became so accustomed to Charlotte's silliness that he would have been disappointed, rather than otherwise, had she shown herself as wise as other people ; and satisfied his conscience with regard to Kate by sometimes superintending her infant studies himself.

But why did he relinquish the happiness he had expected from Ellen's society ? Simply because he found that having her at home created constant dissensions and jealousies, which forced him to a more constant exercise of authority than he was inclined to exercise. Besides, she got on very well at Penmorfa. Not that he ever saw her there, for his love for Julia's child, great as it was, never quite enabled him to overcome his distaste to revisit a place where he had undergone great suffering ; but when she came on her short and infrequent visits to the Park, he was charmed by her likeness to her dead mother, and decided that the life she led at Penmorfa was excellently suited to her disposition.

Ah ! Mr. Egerton, Mr. Egerton ; you laid a very flattering unction to your soul when you persuaded yourself of this ; but no man can put aside a positive duty on even the most plausible grounds, and expect not to suffer by it. If her stepmother's guidance was not to be trusted, could not her father's exertions have obviated much much that was amiss ? And would not the task have been as interesting as it was natural, and have done very extensive good ?

Other people thought, and Mrs. Dashwood said, this ; but Mr. Egerton followed his own will, or rather that of his wife ; and so Ellen grew up a sweet, lovable girl, as modest as a violet and as clinging as a woodbine, but totally deficient in the qualities which enable a woman to encounter the roughs and smooths of actual life.

Yet what mattered it ? What shadows were on her path—what ruffled leaf in her bed of roses ? None, as far as the eye of man could see. And yet when, after the lapse

of those thirteen years, the summons came which recalled her home, Mrs. Floyd instinctively felt that Ellen had not been armed as she ought to have been for the battle of life.

"I am ashamed," she wrote to Mrs. Dashwood, "to express even to you, my dear friend, the terror I feel in parting with my Ellen. I know Granville's deep love for his child; I know that she goes to a home where she will meet only with kindness and affection—still my heart fails me as I trust her from beneath my own eye. She has hitherto been guided by me in everything. How will she accustom herself to act unsupported?"

Mrs. Dashwood read the letter and sighed. If human support was all to which the fair young girl had to trust, Mrs. Floyd's fears were, indeed, well founded. But she could not mean *that*. Oh, no; it was simply an exaggerated expression of anxiety natural to an elderly woman long estranged from the world, as she thought how the youthful heiress was about to be launched for the first time on the waves of life. Thus thinking, she answered the letter encouragingly—spoke of the warm feeling of interest still subsisting in the neighbourhood in favour of "dear Julia's" child, and promising that, as far as human beings could aid their fellows, so far would she and her children be true friends to Ellen.

And Mrs. Floyd tried to be comforted, repeated over and over again to herself that it was all quite natural—quite right that Ellen should go home; and then—why then she watched the carriage that bore her away, till it disappeared behind the hill; and when it was quite gone, she sighed, wiped her spectacles, prayed God to bless her darling, and hastened away to tend Ellen's birds and flowers, which had been neglected in the bustle of the morning. How desolate the rooms seemed now that her sunny smile no longer brightened them, her merry voice no longer rang through them! But she would come back soon; oh yes, soon, very soon!

Ellen's first letter from home did more than aught else to soothe Mrs. Floyd's anxieties. It was a bright, happy, natural letter, describing in glowing terms the beauty of Egerton Park; the increase in growth and good looks of

her little sister ; the cordiality of her stepmother ; and the happiness of being once more with her own darling papa.

"Poor child ! poor child !" said the old lady, as she closed the letter ; "she is—she will be happy. I must let good Mrs. Jones see this ; it will gratify her to find that Ellen, even in the first joy of such a reception, does not forget her old friends here."

She pulled the bell ; ordered her old-fashioned chariot, with its steady, well-tried Welsh horses, and drove up hill and down dale, and along the seashore, where the tide often overflowed the so-called road, till she reached the residence of the vicar and his good old wife.

But this is not the place to describe either the Joneses or their dwelling-place. Our present destination is Egerton Park.

CHAPTER II.

ELLEN.

"A tree that's ever in the bloom,
Whose fruit is never ripe,
A wish for joys that never come—
Such are the hopes of *life*."

LIFE, DEATH, AND ETERNITY.

MRS. FLOYD was not altogether mistaken when she imagined that Ellen might find herself unprepared for the contrast of life which her father's house offered to Pen-morfa ; but Ellen herself had few misgivings on the subject. She was scarcely eighteen years of age, of a disposition as facile, and a heart as simple, as a child ; while the entire seclusion in which she had lived till now, and her complete ignorance of the world, made her ready to enjoy the present without any dread of the future. She was at first puzzled by her stepmother's eagerness to exact her solemn promise not to stir beyond the precincts of the park, or attempt to see any one except Sir Francis Vere and the Dashwoods until the great day of the assize ball, on which she was to

make her first appearance in the world. But she submitted without a word of remonstrance to the restrictions, for the assizes opened on the Tuesday after her return home, and she found quite enough to interest and amuse her at present in revisiting her favourite haunts in the beautiful pleasure-grounds, and renewing her acquaintance with Judith and Harry Dashwood. Judith though Ellen's senior by half a dozen years had always been her friend, and was now, very naturally, established as her guide and director in the mazes of the world on whose threshold she stood. How lucky she was to find one so clever and good-natured !

Thus, instead of repining, as Judith was inclined to do, at Mrs. Egerton's commands, Ellen made herself very happy indeed : visited old nurse Brown, at the South Lodge ; went with Mr. Egerton to his home farm—an especial hobby of his ; passed judgment on some Welsh sheep he had lately got ; and proposed that he should send to Penmorfa for her little pony Minnie, that Kate might ride her. Minnie was now too small for her ; but would carry Kate admirably.

"Then you like riding, Ellen ?" her father said ; "that is well, we shall make all the better companions for one another."

These few words, and the fond look that accompanied them, went to Ellen's heart of hearts, and induced her to tell Judith in very strict confidence that her father was the most charming, as well as the handsomest, man she had ever seen.

Judith, though she almost agreed with her, could not help laughing a little at the gravity with which the announcement was made ; for she very well remembered that on the two occasions on which she had visited at Penmorfa, she had never chanced to see any one the whole time she spent there, except the very eccentric clergyman Mr. Jones. She ventured to suggest that the comparison did not do Mr. Egerton justice.

"Mr. Jones is a very good and very clever man, Judith," said Ellen, a little hotly ; "and I am sure he preaches a great deal better than Mr. Felton does."

"Perhaps so, Ellen, but as Mr. Jones preaches in Welsh, and Mr. Felton in English, I prefer the latter. Still, I con-

fess that Mr. Jones's conversation was all you had at Penmorfa to keep your minds from utter stagnation."

"Judith, you do not know anything about Penmorfa," said Ellen, reddening; "that is," she added more gently, "you know as little about it as I do of this neighbourhood."

"You are right, Ellen dear. I had no title to say what I did, but I confess I used to regret that you should be shut up in that lonely Welsh home, when Egerton Park was the place where you ought to be, and where you were so much wanted."

"Do not flatter me, Judith," said Ellen caressingly, "or how shall I be able to look up to you as my Mentor. Yet grandmamma told me if I were ever in a difficulty to apply to Judith Dashwood."

Judith sighed. "My child, you little know the weak reed to which she would have you trust." Then, with a sudden change of tone she added, "By the way, did you observe how Colonel Wyndham endeavoured to get one little glimpse of your face behind your veil as we left church yesterday?"

"No, indeed I did not, and I am glad of it; I should have thought it very rude."

Judith smiled. "At all events, you must have remarked the tall young man along with him? Everybody in Heddlesham is talking of him. They say he was such a wild, barum-scarum creature when in the 00th; but since he joined the 20th he has become the most studious hermit possible. Sir Edmund Manners, with his usual felicity of expression, described him to mamma as being now *hermetically* sealed, he is so silent. I wish Sir Edmund were so also! Ah, Ellen dear, a bore is—a bore—as I am sure you must allow, since you saw Sir Edmund on Saturday. (By the way," she thought to herself, "why did Mrs. Egerton make an exception in *his* favour?)"

"Do you happen to know the hermit's name, Judith?" asked Ellen, with far more appearance of interest than she had yet displayed with regard to the unknown neighbours of whom she heard her friend speak.

"No; it is Stanfield, or Stauwood, or Stangrove, or something of that kind."

"You are sure it was not Stanhope?"

"Stanhope! No, I think not. But if you really care to know, I shall make Harry find out for you."

"Pray do—it would be so nice if it were!" and Ellen clapped her hands like a child at the very thought. "Grannie would be glad that I should have such a friend in this strange place."

Judith's surprise almost took away her breath. Certainly Ellen was very ignorant of the world, and so was her grandmother, but that Mrs. Floyd should be "glad" that Ellen should have a young dragoon officer as her chosen friend startled her a good deal.

Her constrained look and unusual silence induced Ellen to ask the reason of both.

"Why, dear, it struck me as a little peculiar that you should fancy Mrs. Floyd would approve of such a friend for a young girl."

Ellen blushed furiously. "Oh, Judith, surely you remember Reginald Stanhope at Penmorfa? You know his mother was mamma's dearest friend, and grannie says that one reason why he was sent as a boy to Mr. Jones's care was because it was near Penmorfa, where Mrs. Stanhope lived much as a girl. She was an orphan, you know, and all her holidays were spent with grandmamma, as all Reginald's were with me. Surely you cannot have forgotten Reginald Stanhope, Judith?"

Thus reminded, Judith did at length recall, though rather faintly, that a tall, overgrown boy of fifteen or sixteen had generally accompanied Mr. Jones in his weekly visits to Penmorfa, while she was there. "But you know, Ellen," she said, "a girl of eighteen or nineteen seldom thinks much of a boy a year or two her junior, and soon forgets him."

"True, I did not think of that; and I daresay," she added, after a short silence, "that as you have forgotten Reginald he has forgotten me. He was five years older than I."

Judith smiled again at Ellen's simplicity, and said, "Let us hope not, Ellen, if he be worth remembering, for I am sure you are."

Ellen blushed a little at the implied compliment, for she felt that it was a compliment from Judith, and answered with some hesitation, "I used to like him very much. He

was very kind to me, and grandmamma was very fond of him. I alleged she liked him better than me."

"And you were not jealous?"

"Jealous of Reginald! My dear Judith, can one be jealous of seeing others like those we like? O no, one is only jealous when others are preferred before them."

"That is to be jealous *for*, not *of*, a person."

"I always thought that *was* the only kind of jealousy," she answered so ingenuously, that Judith could not but believe her.

She sighed as she answered, "My dear little Ellen, I had no idea that so unsophisticated a mortal still existed on earth. Long may your delusion last. As for me, I confess to having sometimes felt jealousy for myself, and for myself only; and let me assure you the sensation is not agreeable, so I trust you may be spared it."

There was a touch of bitterness in Judith's tone that made Ellen uncomfortable, she scarce knew why, and she said timidly, "Judith, do you know you sometimes frighten me by the way you speak?"

"Frighten you, my pet! Indeed I have no wish to do that; but the truth is," she said, sadly, "that when I hear you say such things as you did just now, it reminds me of a time when I too was young, and hopeful, and happy, and spoke just as I thought; I do not do so now. But," seeing Ellen attempt to speak, "I shall always speak to you as I think, so don't doubt my veracity when I tell you that I fully sympathize in your hope that the hermit may be your old friend. I shall set Harry to work at once to find out his name and condition, whence he comes, whither he goes, and shall report progress as soon as may be. And there he is, so let us send him at once. Harry!"

A tall handsome lad of seventeen turned at his sister's voice, and joined them with alacrity.

"Harry, what is the name of the officer Captain Hazlewood was speaking of yesterday? the melancholy Jaques with the brown moustache?"

"The one Kate calls 'All-eyes-and-no-eyes,' he has such large brown ones that never seem to see anybody or anything. They say he is immensely clever, though very odd."

"Oh, I know he is odd, but his name, Hal—his name?"

" Stanhope — Reginald Stanhope, senior lieutenant of H.M.'s 20th Dragoons."

" Ellen, let me congratulate you ;" and in spite of Judith's mocking tone Ellen was not ashamed to express her satisfaction at the discovery of her old friend being so near her.

CHAPTER III.

REGINALD.

" Why do you keep aloof,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making !"
SHAKESPEARE.

JUDITH DASHWOOD judged Mrs. Egerton rightly when she suspected that Sir Edmund Manners had been permitted to see Ellen by " no unlucky mistake." Mrs. Egerton was essentially a manœuvring woman, eager to attract attention and admiration to herself by every means in her power, and resolved to make use of her stepdaughter's return home to gather round her all that was amusing, exciting, and agreeable. Nor was this her only aim. She was very kind to Ellen, and very desirous to make her happy, so far as happiness consisted in worldly pleasures ; but she had resolved that she should not long remain at Egerton Park. She must marry early ; it would be gratifying to herself to have her make a good match under her chaperonage ; it would please her father to have her settled in their neighbourhood, and it would be a great matter for Kate in after-years to have a sister well married in the county.

This being decided, Mrs. Egerton had studied the question in all its bearings, and had made up her mind that Ellen's first appearance should be a decided " success." For this purpose she had secluded her from the eyes of the curious ; for this, also, she had hinted to all her friends that she considered her quite a beauty ; not like Miss Manners or Lady Beatrice Hauton, in a *prononcé* style, but very, very lovely ; and for this also she had contrived that her stepdaughter

should be in the drawing-room when Lady Agnes Manners and her son were announced.

Sir Edmund was a fool, it is true, but he would be all the more easily guided; his mother was very anxious that he should marry; he was the richest bachelor in the county; and to be admired by him would, Mrs. Egerton flattered herself, make Ellen quite distinguished. Besides, he was high sheriff for that year, and if Ellen was his first partner, she would be queen of the ball. Therefore Sir Edmund had been permitted to see her; and, as Mrs. Egerton desired, he had entreated the honour of one dance with her at the assize ball, and had said so many pretty things that Ellen was uncomfortable and Mrs. Egerton enchanted; and so all looked propitious for the great night.

And when it came! Sir Edmund asked Miss Egerton's hand for the first quadrille just as the young lady had accepted Sir Francis Vere, and was walking off to take her place in the dance.

Mrs. Egerton almost wept at this *contretemps*. "But," she said, pathetically, to Mrs. Dashwood, "I knew how it would be when Granville insisted on detaining Ellen in the anteroom, to listen to all old Mr. Walsingham's flowery nonsense. We were to have joined Lady Agnes's party, but that delay lost everything. Sir Francis Vere came up, said he was charmed to find Ellen disengaged, and there was an end of all! Was it not provoking?"

"Perhaps Ellen was less disappointed than you suppose. Sir Francis is an old friend of hers, while Sir Edmund is——"

"High sheriff!" concluded Mrs. Egerton, quickly. "And then, you know, his mother had told me he meant to open the ball with Ellen. But who is that whom Captain Hazlewood is introducing to Judith? It is that dreadful Mr. Stanhope! You have heard of him, have you not? They say he is a duellist, and a gambler, and what not. I should not like him to be introduced to Ellen."

Mrs. Dashwood quietly turned her eyeglass on the person so severely stigmatized, and said, "I think you mistake Mr. Stanhope for Mr. Spencer; Mr. Stanhope is simply eccentric, not wicked."

The answer was scarcely heard in Mrs. Egerton's amaze-

ment that Colonel Wyndham should continue to bow to those Winterton girls, after the warning she had given him that they were scarcely received in the country—were mere manufacturing people, with money, perhaps, but no family.

Meanwhile Judith was making some progress in her acquaintance with Mr. Stanhope. She had questioned Captain Hazlewood about him; had learned that he was a reserved man, one who never touched on his private affairs himself, and skilfully avoided any investigation into them by others. Still it was well known that the regiment from which he had exchanged into the 20th was a most extravagant one, and that he had not been behind his brother officers in that respect. His conduct since his exchange, however, had been exemplary, although his extreme studiousness and reserve made him more respected than loved by his brother officers.

"All are on good terms with Stanhope," Captain Hazlewood concluded; "but no one is intimate with him. Colonel Wyndham and I are more so than any other. I like Stanhope very much, and the colonel, having been an old friend of his father's, takes a kind of parental interest in him, ventures to interfere now and then with his periodical fits of over-study, and, indeed, actually forced him here to-night."

"Is he from Wales?"

"No, I believe not; indeed, I am sure that he is not a Welshman. He has, or rather had, a small property in one of the southern counties,—Hampshire, I think. But, perhaps, Miss Dashwood, you will allow me to introduce him. There he is, leaning against that pillar. I know he would get on well with you; and he really is a fine fellow. Will you permit me?"

"With pleasure." And the introduction took place. Judith looked at him keenly. She fancied herself somewhat of a physiognomist, and desired to know whether Ellen's confident belief that he would be a true friend was well founded. The first glance puzzled her. His features were fine; his mouth—that most characteristic feature—particularly well formed, relaxing easily into a smile; but his large, grey eyes had a peculiarity about them which she did not quite like, they were almost veiled by their long

drooping lashes, and though his white eyelids were exquisitely formed, and the lashes of the deepest black, they gave an effeminate look to the face, which was only redeemed by the firmness of the jaw, and the thick moustache which shaded the upper lip without concealing, as many moustaches do, the real form of the mouth.

"You are no dancer, I fear, Mr. Stanhope?" she said, hesitating how to begin a conversation.

"I am alike unknowing and unknown here," he said; and the tone of his voice was deep and manly, which Miss Dashwood was pleased to think in his favour.

"May I ask whether that is not in some degree your own fault?" she replied, interrogatively.

"I confess it is," he answered, languidly; "but *hitherto* I have not repented of my fault." And the emphasis on the "hitherto," and the veiled glance of the dark eyes, implied a compliment which it was impossible to overlook.

Judith laughed, and said frankly, "I allowed Captain Hazlewood to introduce you to me; or perhaps, I should say, I hinted to him that he might, because a very dear young friend of mine tells me that you and she used to be well acquainted long ago."

A momentary, but very visible, cloud passed over Mr. Stanhope's face at these words. His eyes flashed, his nostril dilated, and the very tone of his voice was altered, as he coldly pronounced the single word, "Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed," Judith answered, as if not remarking his confusion; "she tells me her friend was in the 00th, when she saw him last; but she believes he exchanged into the 20th. The Christian name was Reginald."

"I am puzzled as to the acquaintance to whom you allude," he said, still rather coldly; "but I confess that my name is Reginald, though few call me so now," he added with a half-sigh, "and I left the 00th some years ago. May I ask the name of my unknown friend—is she here?" And as he shot a quick, sharp glance round the room, Judith was amazed to see how keen and penetrating those veiled eyes could become.

"She is here: her name is Miss Egerton."

He shook his head slightly. "I am not acquainted with any one of that name," he replied; and Judith could not but

fancy that there was a tone of relief in his voice as he added, "I think I have heard my brother officers speak of a Mrs. Egerton, who has already been attentive to our colonel."

Judith bowed an affirmative.

"And Miss Egerton is the eldest daughter, lately returned from school, is she not—and makes her first appearance to-night? You see, Miss Dashwood, I do hear something of what goes on."

"You are, I confess, better informed than I expected. That is Miss Egerton opposite us at this moment, dancing with Sir Francis Vere."

"What a sweet young face!"

It was the expression every one had used on seeing Ellen. No one had exclaimed, as Mrs. Egerton had wished them to do, "What a beautiful girl!" but every one whispered, "What a sweet young face!"

"And somehow," he continued, more as if thinking aloud than speaking to a stranger, "it seems to me a strangely familiar one. I do not know why it should be so, unless that when I feel any particular attraction towards a person on first meeting them, I am apt to imagine that I already know them. Perhaps I have met them in some previous state of existence. Have you ever felt this?" he asked, turning to Judith with animation, "if not with people, with music? Does not the strain that pleases us when first heard seem the echo of some half-forgotten memory?"

"I do not analyze my admiration as you do," she answered, a little amused at the student-like speculation, "but I confess to have fancied when any melody caught my ear at first that it seemed, as you say, an indistinct echo of the past. Perhaps it may be a remnant of heaven."

She said the last words with a smile, but he answered seriously, "It is possible. There are still some traces of heaven left clinging to our fallen race. See, for instance, the clear, pure light in the eyes of a young child. What but the light of heaven can give them so touching an expression?" You scarcely ever see the same truthful, trusting look in the eyes of grown people?"

"I have seen it sometimes," Judith replied, thinking the while that Ellen's eye had just such a look of innocent trust-

fulness, but she did not choose to say so to the strange speculative genius who talked thus oddly in a ball-room, and so she added lightly, "We have, however, wandered far from our subject. I was about to ask you whether you had ever been in Wales?"

"I have, indeed; several of my happiest years were spent there."

"In Carnarvonshire?"

"Yes."

"And you know a place on the Conway called Penmorfa?"

"Most certainly I do. Mrs. Floyd was the kindest friend I ever had."

"And yet you refuse to acknowledge her grand-daughter, Miss Egerton, as an acquaintance."

"Her grand-daughter! Miss Egerton! You do not mean that that lovely girl is my dear little playmate, Ellen of Penmorfa?"

"Ellen of Penmorfa she is, I assure you; and I cannot understand how you were so stupid as not to recognize her. She is not one easily forgotten."

"I cannot explain it, I am so confused, so delighted. May I go to her? may I speak to her?" and without waiting for an answer he hurried his astonished partner across the room to the spot where Ellen, having just concluded her quadrille with Sir Francis Vere, stood watching the waltzers, with her hand resting on her father's arm. On their way thither Mr. Stanhope tried to explain to Judith that, having been accustomed to connect Miss Egerton solely with Wales, having seen her only under her grandmother's roof, and heard her always called "Ellen" only, it was quite natural that the name of Egerton should rouse no familiar associations in his mind. It was, moreover, five years since he had seen her. She was then a mere child. "Yet you must remember," he concluded, "that I said her countenance was familiar to me?"

"Yes; but you attributed the familiarity to a dream of heaven," she answered gaily.

"And it is so. Would that I could go back to that dream of paradise, to those fresh, innocent days of Penmorfa! Alas! Miss Dashwood, there are few of us who, when looking

back, are not inclined to feel themselves further off from heaven than when they were boys."

There was an earnestness wholly devoid of affectation in the regretful tone with which these words were uttered. Judith felt she durst jest with him no longer, and so she simply led him up to her friend, and said, "Let me present Mr. Stanhope to you, Ellen. He has as lively a recollection of Penmorfa as even you could desire."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

"Childhood's loved group revisits every scene,
The tangled woodwalk and the tufted green
Indulgent memory wakes, and lo they live."

PLEASURES OF MEMORY.

ELLEN gave a start of disappointment when Judith, instead of presenting to her the bright, lively companion of her childhood, introduced a tall, grave man, utterly unlike the picture memory had drawn of Reginald Stanhope, and she drew back with a look of bewilderment. But when he took her reluctant hand, enclosing her fingers entirely in his grasp, according to the well-remembered fashion of his boyhood—when he exclaimed, "Thank Heaven we have met again!" the tone of his voice removed all doubt of his identity, and a vivid blush dyed her cheek, a bright smile curled her lip, as, turning to her father, she said,—

"Papa, this is my old friend Reginald Stanhope. Are you not glad?"

The first greetings were over, the first hurried and scarcely comprehensible exchange of question and answer which every one makes on meeting old friends after a long separation; and then they seated themselves on an ottoman at the bottom of the ball-room, and began to talk more calmly.

"So neither recognized the other," Ellen gaily observed, as again he took her hand, and looked at her with the fond brotherly expression on his face, she remembered years ago.

"No! how could we? You were a child then, you are a woman now. As for me——"

"As for you, I begin to see the old Reginald Stanhope stealing out behind that thick moustache, and now I wonder I had any difficulty in recognizing you. I had none when you spoke. I should know your voice anywhere."

"And I yours. But everything else about you is changed. When I saw you last you were a slight little fairy, with golden locks and laughing eyes; now you are tall and brown-haired, and very grave and quiet, I suppose."

"In general I am neither one nor other, I assure you, Reginald. But you may easily suppose that I still feel myself a stranger in England. Egerton Park will feel much more like home now that you are come."

The entire confidence in himself, and the great ignorance of the world and its ways betrayed by this innocent remark, touched the young man, and brought a tear to his eyes, but it passed as he said,—*"Thank you, Ellen; it does me good to hear you speak to me just as you used to do. And now when you smile, I too see the old child-face come back again, and I feel you are not changed, only—only improved. But tell me, may I still call you Ellen? It seems presumptuous, and yet no other word comes to my lips when thinking of you."*

"Why should you not?" she answered with a laugh. "I should as little think of calling you Mr. Stanhope as of calling papa Mr. Egerton, or Harry Dashwood Mr. Dashwood."

"These Dashwoods seem great friends of yours? At least Miss Dashwood spoke of you as if she loved you. I like to hear one woman speak so of another."

"That is not rare—is it Reginald?" and the bright eyes grew brighter with the merry smile which accompanied the question, and the child-face shone out more and more as the first embarrassment of meeting her old friend in such new circumstances wore off. "But you are right," she added, earnestly. "Judith Dashwood does really love me. She is my guide and Mentor in this strange new world into which I am thrown. Her friendship for me is something like yours; only as we were little together in early life we have not the childish remembrances you and I have, and which our dear mothers had before us."

"How I love to hear my darling mother spoken of again," he said, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "Yet I fear she could scarce recognize in me the boy she used to love, and of whom she prophesied such great things?"

"I am sure she could; and would find her prophecy had come true. Miss Dashwood says all your brother officers speak of you as a——"

"Never mind what *they* say," he interrupted. "They don't know me. They see the outside only—for the rest, God forgive me, it is not what it might have been. But we must not sit here talking on grave subjects. It is your first ball, and I know you love dancing: will you waltz with me?"

"I doubt whether I can. The Dashwoods have been trying to teach me, but—do not laugh at me, Reginald—but the truth is I don't like it. It is too new, too *prononcé*, I would rather not, if I might choose."

"Then do choose it, for I long to speak more of the merry, merry days when we were young." And then he quoted, not inaptly, L. E. L's pretty lines—

"But little recked we then of those sick fancies
To which in after-life the spirit yields;
Our world was of the fairies and romances
With which we wander'd o'er the summer fields.
Then did we question of the down-balls blowing
To know if some slight wish would come to pass;
If show'rs we fear'd, we sought where there was growing
Some weather-flower, which was our weather glass,
In the old, old times—the dear old times."

"You remember all those childishnesses, Ellen?"

"Ah, so well!"

"How I should like to stand once more on the look-out at Penmorfa, and gaze down on the rapid river foaming below, and the fine old trees, and the shattered rocks, with their drapery of creepers and ivy. And the old castle of Conway, Ellen. Do you ever go there now, and scramble up to the flag-tower as we used to do—clinging to the sturdy roots of the ivy, and terrifying the old jackdaws in their nests above, and dear Mrs. Floyd in the court below, with our antics? What a glorious old place it was, and what a merry time. The very thought of it makes me a boy again. And now

that waltz is over at last. We may dance together again. A regular old country dance it is. Come Ellen."

And as they rose to join the long array of couples, people stared in amazement—so sudden a transformation had taken place in the cold, reserved Stanhope.

"Upon my word Miss Egerton is endowed with the art of gramarye," Colonel Wyndham observed to Mr. Egerton, who, ever hovering near his daughter, was watching her with a happy smile. "I never saw Stanhope dance before."

The opportunity was favourable, and Mr. Egerton availed himself of it, to make inquiries as to the character Stanhope bore in the regiment. He had been a childish companion of his daughter, he explained, but before allowing the renewal of their former intimacy, he wished to know how he was esteemed.

Nothing could be more favourable than the good-natured colonel's account of him. He had been several years in his regiment, and the only complaint that could be made of him was that he was a trifle too studious.

"He has actually contrived to keep his terms at Oxford," said Colonel Wyndham, with exultation, "and taken a first class. Of course, as he is situated, a double first was impossible; but we have not many in our profession who could have done so much."

"I had understood that before he entered the 20th he was very different from what you describe."

"I believe he was. Between ourselves, I suspect he was just what other young men are when they have no one to look after them. But all that is passed now. I have heard it hinted that an unhappy love affair brought him to his senses. I don't know how it was exactly. All I can say is, that since he joined us he has been all that an officer should be. You need have no hesitation in admitting him into your family circle. And now will you name me to your daughter?"

The colonel made himself so agreeable to Ellen, by talking of Reginald Stanhope, that she began to believe that she should find it less formidable to converse with strangers than she had dared to anticipate; and when one after another of her father's friends was introduced to her, each urging some special claim on her attention—when she was never allowed to sit a dance, but found her tablets crowded

with the names of claimants for her hand throughout the evening—she learned to understand the pleasures of a ball, and actually regretted that it so soon came to an end.

Mrs. Egerton was less satisfied with the events of the evening, Ellen had never once danced with Sir Edmund Manners. Colonel Wyndham, instead of escorting her into supper, had been once more with "those Wintertons;" and Mr. Trevillian had found it impossible to bring Ellen to join her at the upper end of the table, she was so comfortably established at the lower end between her father and Mr. Stanhope.

"How often did you dance with Mr. Stanhope, Ellen?" she asked, rather sharply.

"Indeed, mamma, I do not know: five or six times, I dare say."

"How could you do such a thing, my love? It is quite wrong—quite improper."

Ellen looked up in surprise. The idea of dancing all night with Reginald would have seemed so far from wrong, that she had been a good deal vexed that they had contrived to be so little together. Mr. Egerton explained to his wife on what terms they had been as children—that he had himself permitted Ellen to dance with her old friend as often as she pleased; but Mrs. Egerton was tired and out of humour, and read Ellen a lecture on her ignorance of the world and inattention to the etiquette of society, which would have made her very wretched, if anything could have done so on so happy a night. As it was, she gently acknowledged her ignorance, and begged her stepmother to enlighten it for the future.

Thus pacified, Mrs. Egerton turned from the painful subject to inform her husband that she had promised Colonel Wyndham to patronize the amateur theatricals they were getting up for the Infirmary, and that as she had secured a double box, he must assist her to have it well filled. Did he think the Mannerses would join their party?

The carriage drawing up at the hall door prevented an immediate reply; but, when alone with his wife, he asked her why she had taken so sudden a fancy to the Mannerses. Hitherto they had not been great friends, and he did not

think Louisa Manners was ever likely to be intimate with Ellen.

Mrs. Egerton hesitated to answer so straightforward a question, but at length said, that whatever her husband might think, she did not approve of restricting Ellen's friendships to Judith Dashwood and her brother, and that young Stanhope, whom he seemed so ready to adopt at once as a member of his family.

Mr. Egerton laughed at the foolish speech, but answered quietly, "You know as well as I do, Charlotte, that if my wishes alone were concerned, Harry Vere would be the son of my adoption. But such things cannot be forced—remember that," he added, more sternly; "nor may childish intimacies be broken, unless for some good cause. Luckily they seldom go farther than friendship, and I do not think will do so in the present case. However, I have made inquiries about this young man, which have been answered satisfactorily."

"Indeed!" and the tone showed that Mrs. Egerton was far from pleased. "So that is what you really want for Ellen—a poor baronet, fifteen years older than herself?"

Had Mrs. Egerton not been very cross, she would not have said this, and, having done so, she expected an explosion from her husband; but he only answered,—

"My darling child is scarcely at home under her father's roof, and you fancy I already wish to get rid of her. How little you know me, Charlotte."

"Oh, very well, Mr. Egerton! Of course you must manage your daughter's affairs as you please. But to me it seems good for a girl on entering life to do so with some *éclat*; and, if I had my way, I should take good care who were admitted into the house on friendly terms. Now, the Mannerses——"

At this fresh allusion to them, Mr. Egerton's patience entirely failed him, and he exclaimed, angrily, "I tell you, Charlotte, I had rather see Ellen in her grave than the wife of such a creature as Edmund Manners!" and the red blood rose to his cheek, his eyes seemed to emit sparks of flame, as in strong language he expressed his determination that his darling Ellen should be spared the greatest curse in life,—that of being mated to a fool. It was long since Mrs. Eger-

ton had seen him so much excited, and it terrified her so that she exclaimed,—

“My dear, what could put such an idea in your head? I have as little wish to part with Ellen as you have” (she thought the white lie quite allowable); “but I do not wish her to find her home dull, and so I should like to have a few of the best families visit at the Park now and then.”

“Best families!” muttered her husband—“best humbug! I had rather have rough Frank Vere and plain Captain Hazlewood intimate here, than all the Trevillians, and Hautons, and Mannerses, in the neighbourhood. However, if you *only* want to make Ellen happy at home, you may do as you will.”

Mrs. Egerton had sufficient sense to perceive that it was dangerous to press the subject further at present, so, with a few sweet words, she allowed it to drop. But her resolution was not the less decided to follow her own course silently but surely; and she did so, though with a cunning almost amounting to cleverness she contrived to make it seem as if circumstances, and not her own strong will, forced her to do what she desired.

CHAPTER V.

SIR FRANCIS VERE.

“I know the gentleman
To be of worth and worthy estimation,
And not without desert so well reputed.”

SHAKESPEARE.

ON entering the breakfast-room next morning Mr. Egerton was greeted by both his daughters, and when he saw that Ellen's cheek was as rosy, and her smile as light-hearted as Kate's, he murmured to himself, “Establishment for that child—ridiculous!” And, indeed, it did seem ridiculous; for in many things the elder sister was far more childlike and unformed than the younger. Kate's had been a strange life for a girl of ten years of age. Her mother's vanity had introduced her into society from her very babyhood; thus

she was marvellously well versed in wordly tactics, could comprehend what was passing before her, perceive what was ludicrous, remark on what was eccentric, or make her observations on people and things with an air of experience at once amusing and painful when uttered by so young a child. Naturally sharp and clever, her father had amused himself by superintending her intellectual education, and in some things she was very far advanced for her age, in others wofully ignorant; for while all moral qualities had been carefully inculcated, and she had been taught by Mr. Egerton to esteem honourable conduct and complete truthfulness above every other qualification—religious principles, self-denial, humility, or reliance on a higher power than her own for the regulation of her daily life, had been but slightly insisted upon.

Hitherto the pet and plaything of both her father and mother, she was looked upon as a spoilt child by every one; yet her natural disposition was so good, her heart so generous, and her temper so sweet, that all liked the child and aided in the "spoiling system" of which she was the unconscious victim. All, except Harry Dashwood; he sometimes ventured to scold Kate and try to keep her unruly tongue in order, and the consequence was that they had continual squabbles together, and yet were the best friends in the world.

"So the ball has not knocked you up, my love?" Mr. Egerton said, as he gave Ellen her morning kiss.

"Not one bit, papa," Kate answered for her. "I have been telling her she promises to make a very tolerable fine lady."

"You have already undergone a very minute examination I suppose?" he said to Ellen.

She smiled an affirmative, while Kate replied, "O yes, she has told me everything, about Mr. Stanhope especially. She says he really was a very nice boy."

"You don't seem to think him a nice man, Kate," said her father, with a smile.

"Indeed, I don't, papa. As for his love of books, I say nothing against that, for Captain Hazlewood reads, and so does Harry, and so do you and I, papa—but he is so high and mighty. He was asked to the Attwoods the night I was there, and refused to come because it was a children's

party. Now, I don't like that sort of thing. Captain Hazlewood did not think it beneath him to come."

"Mr. Stanhope has been ill, Kate," said Ellen, deprecatingly.

"It may be so ; but I suspect Harry is right in thinking him a muff."

"I don't know what that means, Kate."

"Oh, a softie ; while Captain Hazlewood is a regular brick. Harry calls him a fast specimen of a slow regiment."

"I wish Harry would remember you are a girl, Kate, and not teach you slang," said her father.

"Why, papa, slang is far more expressive than common talk ?"

"The very reason it is unfit for girls. The less expressive their language is, the better, my dear."

"I don't at all agree with you, papa," said the young lady coolly. "Moreover, I always wish I had been a boy."

"Much better not, love—for you would have been a very troublesome little pickle." And yet he sighed as he said the words, for he had longed that the name of Egerton should descend to his sons, and his sons' sons. Kate neither attended to his words nor his sigh, but rushing up to her mother, who entered the breakfast-room at the moment, she asked whether Captain Hazlewood was to be in their box at the amateur theatricals. "You promised to settle it mamma. Did you do so ?"

"No, nothing is settled ; but I told Colonel Wyndham that I should bring a large party."

"Thank goodness we shall not have the colonel himself in our box," Kate ejaculated ; "he prosed terribly, and I don't believe anybody would pay him attention if he were not so rich. Everybody speaks of *that*, as if money, money, money were the only thing worth having in the world."

"It is not a thing to be despised, Miss Kate," said her father.

"O no, of course not ; but to see the way people pay court to it is shocking. Now Miss Attwood is always so very civil to the colonel."

"Kate, don't be a gossip," said her father, unfolding the *Times*, and glancing over the leading article.

"Well, papa, I won't if I can help it ; but it really was very funny the other night."

"What?" asked her judicious mother.

"Oh, I can't describe it all, mamma; but the talk they all made about him. Mrs. Fox wagged her old bay wig as she went on prose, prosing; and every now and then one could catch words like 'Very young for a colonel—scarce fifty;'—I wonder what she thinks old!—or, 'heir to ten thousand a year'—or, 'pretty little place near Southampton'—'means to leave the army;' and so on. Then Mrs. Brudenell would take up the wondrous tale,—and only think, mamma, she had on that old green satin again. Harry calls her the evergreen, and Sir Edmund Manners thought he too would say something clever, so he hammered out an attempt at 'Fox crowned with bays,' and wanted us to laugh, but it was both stale and farfetched, so we would not."

"Kate, you are intolerable!" exclaimed her father. "If you go on at this rate, you must be sent to school."

"Well, pa, I am done for the present. Are you, Ellen dear? for I want you to help me with my French lesson; Mademoiselle will be here in an hour, and I have not yet looked at it."

"And then, Ellen, you may join me in the library;" and Mr. Egerton, gathering his letters and papers together, quitted the breakfast-room.

"Heigho! I am very tired and sleepy," ejaculated his wife, when left alone. "I wish I had lain still till luncheon." So she settled herself comfortably in an easy chair, and taking up the *Morning Post*, conned column after column of fashionable intelligence, until she fell into a half-slumber and dreamed of *fêtes* and balls till roused by the gong for luncheon.

Sir Francis Vere entered the dining-room with Mr. Egerton, and, remembering the lesson of last night, Mrs. Egerton received him with unusual graciousness, asking him whether he had claimed cousinship with Ellen; as his near connection with Mrs. Floyd entitled him to do.

Mr. Egerton looked up with a curious, half-amused, half-wondering glance at this sudden access of civility to his favourite; but Sir Francis himself took it in good part, declaring he had done his best to be acknowledged as a relation by Miss Egerton, and that he hoped that he had proved his right to be considered a cousin.

"O yes," said Kate, flippantly; "*I* always call you Cousin Frank—so of course Ellen will."

Sir Francis reddened a little, and said that did not follow.

Ellen, however, replied very cordially though very modestly, that grandmamma considered the Veres as her nearest connections, and that as she had always been accustomed to think of Mrs. Beaumont as cousin Mary, she was quite ready to consider Mrs. Beaumont's brother as cousin Frank.

Mr. Egerton smiled and said "That's right, Ellen;" while Sir Francis shook hands with her very heartily, and so the cousinship was established; while Mrs. Egerton played her part so well, that her unsuspecting husband never imagined that she had yielded for the present to his express wishes, only that she might more easily follow out her own plans by-and-by. She well understood the wisdom of *reculer pour mieux sauter*, and her game just now was to lead Mr. Egerton to suppose that she had relinquished her own projects for his; while in reality she only kept her designs on Sir Edmund Manners in the background till chance or good generalship gave them an opening. So she asked Ellen whether she had often seen Mrs. Beaumont at Penmorfa.

"Mary is a very stay-at-home person," said Sir Francis; "so I do not think Miss Egerton can have seen her often."

"Not Miss Egerton—*Ellen*," whispered Kate very loud; but nobody attended to the stage aside.

"We have only met twice," Ellen said, "very long ago; but she was so kind to me that I should like very much to see her again."

"I hope you will do so this summer. Mr. Beaumont generally spares her to me for a few weeks in the year, and I expect her at Vere Court in June."

"Indeed, Francis! that is early for Mary to come," Mr. Egerton said; while his wife went off into some pretty speech of delight at hearing such good news, and her hope that Mrs. Beaumont would be as frequently at Egerton Park as possible. In short, she overacted her part a little, but it passed well enough, for at the moment the Dashwoods came in, and in the bustle that followed Mrs. Egerton found it easy to forget Vere Court and all its concerns.

Ellen meanwhile was speculating on the chance of Reginald calling at the Park. She had heard him accept her father's invitation to do so, but it was already three o'clock, and he had not come.

Judith seemed to guess her thoughts ; for as they stood together in the bow window commanding the avenue towards Heddlesham, she asked whether she did not expect to see her old friend Mr. Stanhope to-day.

"I had hoped so," she answered frankly. "I wish very much to introduce him to Mrs. Egerton."

"Then your wish is granted, for there he is, along with Colonel Wyndham and Captain Hazlewood ;" and she pointed to three horsemen who were just then visible at the turn of the avenue.

Mrs. Egerton, delighted by Colonel Wyndham's early visit, received them all graciously, and even singled out Reginald Stanhope as her especial charge, talking to him so pleasantly that both he and Ellen were gratified, especially when she seconded her husband's invitation to him to come frequently to see them when he had no more pressing engagement.

"For I hear," she said with a smile, "that Mr. Stanhope's great fault is that he hurts his health by devotion to his books."

Colonel Wyndham joined in the conversation at this point, begging that Mrs. Egerton would laugh Stanhope out of the book-worm state of being. It was all well enough in moderation, but military men ought to be more in the world than in their study. Men, not books, were the things they had to deal with.

Stanhope smiled, and his smile was very pleasant, as he promised to lay his colonel's advice to heart ; and then other visitors were announced, and the intended ride was rendered impossible by the continued influx of those who had seen Ellen at the assize ball, and came to welcome her return home. Indeed, for that day, the Egerton Park drawing-room was so crowded as to seem like a state reception rather than a private room, and Mrs. Egerton's eyes sparkled to see the Hautons, Trevillians, Attwoods, and Mannerses (the second visit the Mannerses had paid within a week)—all the best families, in short, pouring in to pay their devoirs to Miss

Egerton. Nor, if the truth were told, was she very sorry to see her stepdaughter's old friend, Reginald, obliged to take leave, after having almost exceed the limits of an ordinary first visit, without an opportunity of exchanging more than a chance word with her. But her self-gratulations on this point were soon put to flight on learning from her husband that he had told young Stanhope to return to dinner. He wished to see more of him than one could do in a ball-room.

Mrs. Egerton frowned, but was partially appeased when he added, "And as Wyndham and Hazlewood were with him when I gave the invitation, of course I could not help asking them also. I hope you have no objection?"

"None in the world. I only wonder you did not include the Dashwoods, and Sir Francis," she said, a little satirically."

"Their turn will come by-and-by," he placidly answered, and walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

SOCIETY.

"I can imagine what a scene of gaiety and romance this mansion must have been when they passed like beautiful visions through its halls, or stepped daintily to music in the revels and dances of the cedar gallery; or printed with delicate feet the velvet verdure of these lawns."—WASHINGTON IRVING.

MR. EGERTON'S invitation was most successful in every respect.

Certainly the luxury of "society" is to be found in *petits diners*, where only one or two well-selected guests are assembled, and of this Ellen afterwards became conscious, when comparing the pleasant little party of the evening after the assize ball with the more formal entertainments to which she was invited afterwards.

Mr. Egerton was one of the most agreeable hosts one could have; courteous, kind, and able to converse readily on

any subject, while a slight undercurrent of humour,—no uncommon accompaniment of an indolent and sensitive temperament,—gave vivacity to his own conversation, and brought out whatever of a like nature was to be found in those with whom he talked.

The three other gentlemen were, each in their several styles, worthy to be his associates. Colonel Wyndham, though according to Kate slightly prosy, was a good-natured, sensible man, who had seen life in various contrasting forms, and could describe well what he had seen. Captain Hazlewood was no great talker, but had the art of bringing out the good points of others, while Reginald Stanhope was, to Ellen's mind at least, the ideal of a student, poet, and soldier combined. Still she was a little anxious as to the effect he might produce on her father, and at first he was so reserved and silent that she feared he was making a very bad impression. A chance question from Captain Hazlewood, however, drew out some curious information from him. Mr. Egerton was evidently struck, not only by the matter, but by the manner in which it was given, and exerting himself to draw him out, induced him at last to shake off his shyness, and to talk in his own natural manner—easily, playfully, and yet with a depth of information and quaint wisdom running through his most fanciful conceits, that it was evident his was no common mind—himself no mere superficial smatterer.

"How proud our old vicar would be of his pupil—how charmed grandmamma would be with him!" Ellen thought, when she saw her father's eyes kindle, and his whole face beam as he talked with Reginald. "How lucky I am to have such a friend here!"

Mr. Egerton must have agreed with her; for after that night Reginald Stanhope was told to consider Egerton Park as his home-house while in the neighbourhood. He accepted the proposal as cordially as it was offered, and it occurred neither to him nor to Mr. Egerton that there was anything imprudent in doing so. Reginald only thought that it would be very pleasant to resume his former fraternal relation with Ellen. It would be beneficial to her as she was now situated, with crowds of idle, pleasure-loving people about her, to have a brother's care as well as a father's, at

least if the account he had heard of Mr. Egerton's easy disposition, and Mrs. Egerton's silliness and manœuvring disposition were correct. As to himself, the permission to enter once more into a home circle, the hope of again having womanly sympathy in which to find refreshment from the toils and amusements of his profession, was a thing he had longed for ever since he lost his mother. Could he then resist the acceptance of such an invitation? He would have had difficulty in doing so even had he had scruples on the subject—but he had none. He knew that his own fate in life was fixed, and he was not such a coxcomb as to suppose that Ellen's peace of mind could be endangered by his society. Such an idea never crossed his brain, and if it ever occurred to Mr. Egerton it made a very slight impression on him, the more so that Reginald's manner to Ellen, and hers to him, were as open and confiding as if they had really been brother and sister.

The garrison theatricals took place, and Stanhope, not being one of the actors, was easily induced to join Mrs. Egerton's party along with Harry Dashwood and Sir Francis Vere. Sir Edmund Manners, as high sheriff, had a huge box to himself, where he sat in solitary grandeur, supported only by his mother and sister.

The entertainment was as stupid as amateur theatricals usually are, Captain Hazlewood being the only really good actor of the party; but the house was crowded, and Mrs. Egerton found the time pass pleasantly enough. Colonel Wyndham leaned over the partition between the boxes and chatted to her of all in which her soul delighted: the charms of the assize ball, the great capabilities of the Egerton Park suite of rooms for dancing, the difficulty of gathering county people together except in large parties, and the infinite superiority of such unceremonious meetings as they had had the other evening. Did Mrs. Egerton ever ride? "Ah, that is right! It will be so pleasant if, as the summer advances, we may now and then be permitted to escort the ladies of Egerton Park sometimes. I hear from Stanhope that Miss Egerton is a first-rate horsewoman, but has been little in—shire since her childhood. Could it not be arranged that we should go together to some of the pretty places within easy reach of a lady's riding powers? Vere Court

is well worth a visit, and Hautonville, and Trevillian Grange, and Manners Manor."

The proposal was like a spark of fire to tinder, and before they quitted the theatre Mrs. Egerton hinted that the luncheon-hour at the Park was two o'clock, and that immediately after it Mr. Egerton was in the habit of riding with his daughters, and that Mrs. Egerton saw no objection to peppering the domestic party with a few strangers. Such things require only a beginning. By-and-by it began to be so well understood that luncheon at the Park was the rendezvous among a certain set, that seldom a day passed without seeing one or more gentlemen ready to attend the ladies; and if no other engagement had been formed, the whole riding party returned to dine at the Park, and when the number was large, ended the busy day with acted charades, or an impromptu dance. Nothing could be more pleasant, nothing more unceremonious than these meetings, and all who were allowed to frequent them were loud in their praise.

Of course Heddlesham by no means approved of them. The townspeople were seldom invited to the Park, and then only to very large entertainments; to these reunions of the "*crème de la crème*" they had no access, wherefore much gossip was talked about them. Mrs. Brudenell reported that Kate Egerton often appeared *en cavalier*, and enacted the part of gentleman so tully to the life that—she was ashamed to tell it, but one evening Mrs. Trevillian's servant took her for a groom-boy, and asked leave to light his pipe at the cigar she was smoking! While Mrs. Fox had heard it hinted that Mr. Stanhope, who was so constantly with them now, was heir-at-law to the Egerton Park property, and that was the reason why they were so civil to him. They wanted him to marry one of the daughters. And as to Colonel Wyndham and his officers, soldiering must be an easy life if they had nothing better to do than go on every day as they were doing just now.

Of course these remarks seldom reached the ears of the offenders, and, when they did, were repeated as a capital joke; and Ellen, in her innocent happiness, took it for granted that every one sympathized with her in her intense enjoyment of the present. Many an evening after retiring

to her own pleasant dressing-room, she would seat herself at the window to watch the night folding its sable wings over the scene, and to indulge in vague but pleasant dreams of the future—nay, scarcely of the future yet—the present was still sufficient for her. She was very happy at Egerton Park—she felt she was so, but cared not to investigate why.

One evening in particular she felt this. The day had been a pleasant one. The long ride through the wooded lanes near Heddlesham, rich in the vivid green of early summer, had ended in an impromptu dinner at Vere Court, where their invasion had, at first, nearly driven the old housekeeper beside herself. But their ready gaiety had soon won her heart. She had set before them all her larder could produce, and begged them to come again when she could do more justice to herself and the old place. What a dear old woman she was, and how pleasant it was to hear her speak of "Miss Mary, that was Mrs. Beaumont now." And cousin Frank, as Ellen had now learned to call him, was delightful in his own house, so she hoped that when Mrs. Beaumont did come to Vere Court they should go there again. How merrily they had all laughed on their way home. What nonsense they had all talked—amusing nonsense that one liked to hear—all but poor Sir Edmund Manners. Punsters were certainly very tiresome creatures—at least, such punsters. If it had not been for Reginald's clever retorts, they never could have borne with Sir Edmund. How could people call Reginald grave and silent? he was the greatest talker of the whole party. His funny speeches made even Mr. Egerton laugh. How glad she was that her father liked her old friend. Twice that day she had heard him call him "Reginald" instead of Mr. Stanhope, and press him to come and stay at the Park when the Mannerses did. She wished they were not coming to stay, but if Reginald was there also, it would be less tiresome. She wondered whether Captain Hazlewood would come also. She liked him, he was such a nice, pleasant creature. Kate's name for him, 'the honest man,' suited him exactly.

Such were a few of the detached thoughts that passed through Ellen's brain that sweet May night, as leaning her cheek on her little white hand, her eyes unconsciously

strayed from point to point of the fair scene spread out before her. The moon, sailing amid fleecy clouds, was shedding her fitful light, now on the grand old beech-trees of the park, now on a turn of the river that in the far distance glimmered silvery-white in its passing radiance. A few bright stars shone out between the clouds, a sweet perfume rose up from the flowers beneath her window, while the plaintive voice of the nightingale filled the air with its sweetness.

Again, again, again it came—richer, more plaintive than before, and as Ellen leaned out of the open window enjoying to the full the combined sweet influences of the hour, she sighed—but it was the sigh of pleasure, not pain. Her young heart was full of happiness, and with the natural aspirations of a loving spirit she blessed God, who had laid her line in such pleasant places.

“In all my anticipations of home,” she thought, “I never imagined it could have been so very delightful; and dear grannie seems happy in my happiness. I must read her letter again. The bustle of to-day scarcely allowed me to see more than that they are well.” And she unfolded the letter she had that morning received from Penmorfa.

“How charmingly grannie writes!” she said, as she laid it down; and it was, indeed, pleasant to peruse that minute record of all that she cared for at Penmorfa, her friends, her pensioners, her pets, her flowers; all described with the minuteness which only a loving heart, conscious of being loved in return, could suggest.

These details ended, it went on thus:—“Thank you, my heart’s darling, for finding time amid your many occupations to write me such long letters. It shows me that though the scene is changed, the heart is in the right place. That it may continue so, God Almighty grant! You please me, dearest Ellen, by your sketches of your present life. With such a father—with Mrs. Egerton living apparently only to find pleasures for you—with a lively, well-principled companion like Judith Dashwood, one, moreover, with a little more knowledge of the world than you have yourself—what more had I to desire for you? Little, indeed; yet that little is fulfilled in your having my old favourite Reginald Stanhope to be as a friend and guide to you—to advise you as he used long ago, and to watch over you as he did when you

were a tiny child, relying on his strong arm and strong mind with full faith in both."

After reading such words, was it to be wondered at that Ellen looked upon Reginald Stanhope as "Heaven's last, best gift, a faithful friend?" In no other light had she ever considered him. He paid her far less attention than Sir Edmund Manners did; made her no pretty speeches like Colonel Wyndham; did not ask leave to run her errands like Harry Dashwood, or watch every turn of her head, every glance of her eye, like cousin Frank; but to none of them could she open her heart as she could to him. He knew all her old life better than her father did. That was why she found it so easy to talk to Reginald. She had once fancied she could have applied to papa, when she had no longer grannie to fly to on every emergency—but somehow, though she loved him very, very dearly, she was half afraid of papa, he was so clever and—she paused even in thought before she added—so easily irritated; there was no such dread in consulting Reginald.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIDINGS.

"The oak
Expanding its immense and knotted arms
Embraces the light beech; the pyramids
Of the tall cedar overarching, frame
Most solemn domes within; and far below,
Like clouds suspended in an emerald sky,
The ash and the acacia floating hang
Tremulous and pale." SHELLEY.

Two months only had elapsed since Ellen's return home, but to a stranger it had seemed that she must ever have been, as she was now, the centre of a large, loving, and admiring circle. It was for her, according to Mrs. Egerton, that all the ceremonious dinners and carpet dances were arranged. It was to show Ellen Vere Court and Hantonville and Trevillian Grange that she had exerted herself to arrange the riding and picnic parties which were now the

rage in the neighbourhood, and which made everybody say that there never was so charming a stepmother as Mrs. Egerton.

"Charming, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Brudenell viciously; "if being a charming stepmother consists in leading the girl, and entering herself, into every folly, in gadding about, and in spending money. Did you hear how they were dressed at Manners Manor last week? Actually in white satin and diamonds—both mother and daughter."

"Oh, that was when they were acting charades," said Mrs. Burns, "and I hear Miss Egerton looked so beautiful that Sir Edmund was nearly out of his senses about her."

"He is never in them," was the bitter reply.

"Tut, tut, Mrs. Brudenell!" said Mrs. Fox; "he is not very bright, mayhap, but he is a good, steady young man, and will make an excellent match for Miss Egerton."

"So *you* have got hold of that story too! Mark my words: Mrs. Egerton may do what she likes, fussing about him and petting him—but so long as that student officer dangles about Egerton Park, even Sir Edmund will keep clear of it."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, Sir Edmund and Lady Agnes and Miss Manners are to spend a week there very soon, if they are not there now."

"I don't believe it, Mrs. Fox."

"As you please, ma'am; but I only know it is the case. It seems Sir Edmund is building a model farm at the Ridings, and he must needs have Mr. Egerton's advice about it. You know Lord Elmsley says that Granville Egerton is the best theoretical farmer in the county."

"Well, I am sure he is not a practical one," returned Mrs. Brudenell, skilfully shifting her ground, "I hear he loses his seven hundred a year by his experiments."

"He can afford it. Besides, he does not hunt, as our other neighbours do; and Heddlesham is proud of his skill, and it is quite a pretty thing to see the Egerton home farm. I passed it the other day, and who do you think I found gathered together to see Mr. Egerton's new turnip-cutter? Why, a whole posse of red-coats."

"Mr. Stanhope, I'll be bound, was one of them."

"No, indeed; but Colonel Wyndham was. You know

people do say that Mrs. Egerton would as lief have him for her son-in-law as Sir Edmund."

"A better man, too, to my thinking."

"Well, but besides him there were Captain Hazlewood—a nice, pleasant man he is; he held open the gate for me, as if I had been a young pretty woman—and Fred Hauton, and some others whose names I do not know, and Sir Edmund and his sister, and half a dozen other ladies."

"A pretty place for ladies to go—among cattle and pigs, and manure-heaps, and what not! Really, with all his refinement, Granville Egerton is a very odd man."

"Well, but Mrs. Brudenell, you must hear my story. They were all looking and listening, and Captain Hazlewood taking as much part as any one in the talk, and I heard him say in his good-natured way to Mr. Egerton, 'I tell you what it is, Egerton, when I come into my fortune, I'll apply to you for advice how to manage my home farm, for one I shall have.' And little Kate Egerton laughed in her comical way—"

"Comical! Impertinent you mean," interrupted Mrs. Brudenell.

"—saying that he did not look like a man who would ever be rich, and that when he was, she would come and see him; and he laughed very heartily, and said it was a bargain, and they must shake hands on it; and then he asked Miss Egerton and Miss Dashwood would they come too, and they promised they would. And next he turned to Miss Manners, but what he said to her I don't know, for at the moment I heard Colonel Wyndham say to Miss Dashwood that it was not so unlikely, after all, that they should have to keep their promise, for there were only two bad lives between his friend and a fine estate and title to boot."

This was news indeed. Could it be true? And they speedily turned over the "Peerage" to try and discover which noble family had married a Hazlewood; and, for the time, Egerton Park and its inmates were forgotten.

But the gossip had thus much foundation, that Mrs. Egerton had manœuvred so well, that Lady Agnes Manners, Sir Edmund, and his sister, were even then at the Park; and, best of all, it had been a volunteer visit on their part.

People thought Mrs. Egerton a fool. She was no fool—

she was in many respects a clever woman ; but she had low objects, narrow views, and very limited judgment. She was selfish and worldly, but so far good-natured that she never interfered with others unless it was necessary for the furtherance of her own plans, and her manner was so lively, the turn she gave things so specious, that it was impossible to deny she was an agreeable member of society.

Sir Edmund Manners thought her charming, and she certainly did her utmost to make him think so—flattering him most grossly, and leading him to believe that to all at Egerton Park he was as welcome as he was to herself.

So far was this from being the case, that Mr. Egerton had found it difficult to express any pleasure at the proposed visit, and in talking it over with the usual party assembled at the luncheon-table, had entreated that all or most of them would aid him in getting through the ordeal. His consternation at the idea of a whole week of Lady Agnes, Sir Edmund and Miss Manners's society was so ludicrous that Colonel Wyndham declared that for his part he would come to the rescue as often as duty would allow. Were it not for those confounded "strikes" at Hautonville, he would propose to take up his quarters at the park as Sir Edmund had done ; but as that was not possible, he would, if Mr. Egerton liked, send up a detachment of his regiment, in the shape of Hazlewood and Stanhope. "They are so frequently here, at any rate," he added, with a good-natured laugh, "that we shan't miss them much at barracks. And if Mrs. Egerton will permit a few of us besides to drop in as we do now, why I think we shall make a very tolerable force for attack or defence."

The hearty proposal was received with acclamation by all, and when the Manners party arrived, they found that Lady Beatrice Hauton and her brother, as well as the two young military men, were visitors at the Park as well as themselves.

Mr. Egerton blessed the colonel's generalship, when the next morning Sir Edmund tried to take entire possession of him, insisting on "sitting," as he expressed it, "at the feet of the farming Gamaliel," to gather information for his model farm.

"Hazlewood, my good friend," he cried, as the young man was leaving the room, "will you send Ellen here.

She knows where all my plans are. And," he added in a whisper, "do keep that fellow in talk for half an hour till my return. I have my bailiff to see before I do anything else."

Sir Edmund took Mr. Egerton's desertion graciously, when he found that Miss Egerton really knew something of the plans of the farmhouses and buildings she showed him; that Captain Hazlewood was as conversant as himself with the subsoil plough and patent harrow; that Mr. Stanhope could sketch pretty labourers' cottages for him; and that even the formidable Lady Beatrice Hanton had a little knowledge of poultry, and had seen through Lady Elmsley's beautiful dairy. In short, everybody was interested, or appeared to be so, in his model farm; and he talked of what he had done and was going to do, to his heart's content. So that day Mr. Egerton got off easily enough. The next he took Sir Edmund through his own farm; explained to him how he managed, and what improvements he intended to make; and then, the horses and carriages having been ordered for a distant expedition, the second day also passed tolerably; with this exception, however, that Miss Manners had, from some strange whim or other, chosen to put herself under Mr. Egerton's especial care when riding, both on this morning and that which had preceded it; and if there was one person more than another whom he disliked, it was Miss Manners. With her brother's affectation and vanity she combined an immense development of selfishness; to Lady Agnes's desire to know "who was who" she added an impertinent curiosity into the affairs as well as the families of those with whom she met, and an assumption of superiority, which were peculiarly offensive to Mr. Egerton. Yet he could not escape her, for she had not yet ascertained whether either Captain Hazlewood or Mr. Stanhope were of sufficient importance to be allowed the honour of lifting her into the saddle or attending to her innumerable caprices.

Two days of such martyrdom were enough for Mr. Egerton. The next he pleaded an imperative engagement, and ceremoniously deputed Captain Hazlewood, as the steadiest and most trustworthy of the party, to take charge of the young lady. Miss Manners looked a little annoyed, almost wished she had gone in the carriage with Mrs.

Egerton and Lady Agnes ; but it was now too late to propose it, and, besides, she had that morning received a riding-habit from London, which she particularly wished to wear. So, having insisted that Mr. Egerton should mount her, and see that everything was right before they started, she set off, with "the honest man" riding close by her side.

The object of this particular expedition was the site of the model farm ; and, therefore, Sir Edmund was in a fever of excitement. The Dashwoods, Hautons, Ellen, and Kate made up the riding party ; Reginald had been forced to attend to some unexpected summons from barracks, but hoped to escape in time to join them before their return. "He wished so much," he said, turning courteously to Sir Edmund, "to see 'the Ridings,' of which he had heard so much."

Sir Edmund was pleased with this compliment to what was *his*, and smiled benignly, muttering the while to himself that "young Stanhope was not a bad fellow after all ; only he sang too well by half for a gentleman. He did not like singing men."

As Reginald assisted Ellen to mount he inquired why she rode Patron instead of her own horse.

"Miss Manners is nervous in riding, and begged me to lend her Selim for this one day. Her own mare, she thinks, is slightly lame."

Stanhope frowned. "I don't half like you to ride that huge brute. He is only fit for a gentleman. See already how he frets at being kept waiting."

"We shall start immediately ; and you know I can manage most horses."

"Do not be rash, I beg of you. I shall endeavour to join you as soon as possible. I wish Hazlewood were your squire rather than Sir Edmund," he added in a low voice.

"Reginald wants to call in the military on every occasion," said Kate, at which silly jest they all laughed, as light hearts will at the most trivial matter ; and soon after the cavalcade set off, Ellen waving her hand to Reginald, and assuring him she would be very careful.

"Eh, how ! what is it ? Of what are you to be careful, Miss Egerton ?" asked Sir Edmund, as he stationed himself

next her ; " and how comes Loo to have your horse ? " he added, quickly ; " I like to see you on your pretty Arab, it suits you far better than that tall hunter. I never allow Loo to ride a hunter."

Ellen made very light of the matter, but her explanation evidently annoyed him exceedingly.

" So, you have mounted a horse you cannot manage, simply to gratify a freak of my sister's. I dare say, now, she thought that new habit of her's would show off better on Selim's white silky coat than on Ladybird's dark bay—but it is too bad, too bad ; I am sure Ladybird is not lame."

Ellen was vexed by the tone in which he spoke, and assured him he was distressing himself unnecessarily—Patron was a great favourite of hers, she had frequently ridden him (she did not say that she had been strongly urged never to do so again) and she was very glad to oblige his sister in so trifling a matter.

" You are an angel, Miss Egerton ! " he replied ; and then he began to consider whether this attention to the sister betokened any interest in the brother, and on the chance that it might, became so very highflown in his language that it was a sincere relief to Ellen when Sir Francis Vere overtook them, and broke in on Sir Edmund's discourse.

Cousin Frank was in high spirits. The Beaumonts had arrived last night ; two days sooner than he had expected them ; but luckily Mrs. Fry was ready, so the sooner the better. He hoped that Mary would be able to call at the Park next day, but she was so tired this morning, poor soul ! that he thought it better to leave her to rest. When he was at home the boys would be with him, and the little rogues made such a racket there was no possibility of keeping the house quiet, so the only thing was to mount and ride away.

Then he, too, began to ask Ellen why she rode Patron ? a question which she evaded as well as she could by telling him where they were going, and how anxious they all were to see Sir Edmund's farm. Gratified by her apparent sympathy in his pursuits, Sir Edmund reconciled himself to the interruption of their *tête-à-tête*, and comforted himself with the idea that *that* could be resumed at another time, while his improvements must be attended to at once. Besides,

Miss Egerton's eagerness to see the farm augured well for her interest in its master !

Poor Ellen ! he little knew how much he bored her, and how already she had been calculating when it was possible for Reginald to take his place. How he would admire this ever-varying scenery through which they passed. How trying it was to have those with her so blind to its beauties, and only considering, in an agricultural light, what it would *grow* !

They were now entering the finest part of the Manners Manor woods, and the variety of colour in the foliage charmed Ellen's artist eye.

The trees at this spot grew to an immense height, and through the wide-spreading branches, which formed a leafy canopy overhead, gleamed a golden tracery of sunlight, with here and there a pleasant glimpse of dark-blue sky. Ever and anon a pheasant, with its painted plumage, disappeared behind the trees, or a hare or rabbit dashed fleetly across the path, startled by the tramp of the horses' feet.

Gradually the road narrowed to a bridle-path, along which they were forced to ride in single file, bending the head every now and then to avoid a stray branch that almost grazed the tops of their hats ; or twitching aside their habits to escape the underwood of blackthorn which skirted the path.

Miss Manners was in a thousand difficulties as they entered this defile. Would it not be better to follow the carriage-road ? She felt quite nervous at the idea of taking so secluded a path. There might be poachers hidden behind the thick underwood, and she had been told that they always made it a point to fire at the most important members of the family.

Captain Hazlewood could scarcely help laughing at the notion of poachers attacking such a party, especially in July ; but having already been initiated into her anxiety about her new habit, and her dread last night that they had mistaken her orders, sending her invisible green instead of Adelaide—("It really did look like invisible green in candle-light, Captain Hazlewood")—he saw where the difficulty lay, and, dismounting, he gathered the folds of the precious garment so closely round her that only a very very intrusive blackthorn could reach it.

"Ah, Captain Hazlewood, how nicely you manage. You must have sisters, I am sure," exclaimed the grateful Louisa.

"I wish I had. No, I have no sisters, but I have several cousins, and Lady Emily often allows me to act as her squire when I am at Warneford."

A flash of light broke in upon Miss Manners's mind. This, then, was the Charles Hazlewood of whom she had heard, who was heir presumptive to old Lord Warneford. What a pity it was that she had not been sooner aware of the fact! And she forthwith began to talk to him in a way she had never done before, as to one of the initiated, who could understand what she meant, a person, in short, who was in society, not a mere provincial. And she only interrupted inquiries as to his knowledge of one or other of her London acquaintance to remark how very pretty those garlands of wild-flowers would look if idealized by the hand of a clever artificial flowermaker; indeed, some were so truly elegant, that even as they were they would, if formed of a less perishable material, make an artist's fortune.

Captain Hazlewood laughed at the idea, and quoted the pretty lines of Hood:—

"Oh! ladye, leave the silken thread
And flowery tapestry;
There's living roses on the bush
And blossoms on the tree."

And I confess, Miss Manners, though I fear you will despise me for it, that the living roses are preferable in my eyes to the silken ones; as to that bindweed, it is so exquisitely delicate, and the perfume of the jessamine so delicious, that it seems to me—

'Like the birthday of the world,
When Earth was born in bloom,
The light is made of many dyes,
The air is all perfume.'

And the gigantic captain's blue eyes shone with the pleasure his honest heart took in the beauties of nature.

It was, in sooth, a lovely spot of ground. The trees were swathed with blossoms, but amid many fair sisters none was so delicate in its beauty as the graceful bindweed, which

grew in such profusion as to form almost a screen of dark green leaves and white transparent flowers, now climbing up some stately tree, now hanging in fantastic wreaths above their heads, now creeping close along the ground, and allowing its silvery blossoms to trail along the earth. But Louisa Manners had no taste for natural beauties. To her, the "Ride" in Hyde Park was a thousand times more beautiful than the "Ridings" of Manners Manor, and she felt tempted to scold Captain Hazlewood for his bad taste in not agreeing with her, when the sudden opening of the path into the broad green Ridings prevented her. If possible, this was more enchanting than the tangled labyrinth they had just threaded. Far as the eye could reach stretched a long vista of splendid old trees, whose size seemed to prove them denizens of the forests of England in the days of the Edwards and Henries. The hornbeam and holly were mingled with gigantic oaks and lordly elms, whose superb arms shaded, though they did not meet across, a broad green road, formed of the softest and most elastic turf.

Exclamations of delight burst simultaneously from Captain Hazlewood and Ellen as this magnificent prospect opened before them ; but both the Mannerses and Sir Francis Vere had seen the "Ridings" too often to sympathize with them, and Sir Edmund only said "It was a fine thing of the kind, and charming ground for a canter. Would Miss Egerton not try it?"

Ellen readily agreed, so off they set, Patron taking the lead, and keeping it, in spite of all his mistress's endeavours to the contrary, for certainly his long stride was anything but pleasant when accustomed to Selim's gentle action. After having gone half a mile, however, she became more accustomed to it, and before they reached the model farm, she had persuaded herself that the rapidity of her present steed almost compensated for the smoothness of her pretty Arab.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCIDENT.

"She is not dead?"

This. O no, it is not death.

Hart. What meanest thou?"

JOANNA BAILLIE.

THEY found that the carriage party had arrived at the farm, and that Lady Beatrice Hauton had already convinced the poor cottager's wife, who was its present custodian, that "master" had made an entire mistake in his choice of a situation for the dairy. It ought decidedly to front the north-west, while according to the present plan, it was almost due east; and the poultry-yard must certainly have a south aspect. Lady Agnes, moreover, had been shocked to find that the head builder had not been himself at the farm for the last two days, and when Sir Edmund listened carelessly to both her complaints and Lady Beatrice's, she began to discover that they must not stay long, for if, as was intended, they went to the concert at Heddlesham that evening, they must dine early, and therefore ought to return immediately. Mrs. Egerton seconded her proposal; for having accomplished her end in making Sir Edmund bring them to the farm, she cared little for aught else, and so she bustled about, saying how pretty everything was, and how nice it would be to watch its progress, and how she hoped Sir Edmund would allow them now and then to come and see how it got on; and then was sure the horses must be rested. Miss Manners looked with disgust at the untidy state of the yard littered with building materials, and declared she would rather sit on horseback all day than dismount in such a place. Her brother, cavalierly, told her she might do as she liked. He thought, however, she would act very foolishly if she did not dismount, for as they had come to look at the farm, they intended to look at it, and would, therefore, be some time there; but, to be sure, if she were tired she might either rest in

the summer-house or return in the carriage. Miss Egerton could then have her own horse to ride home.

The fair Louisa's face grew black as night at the last proposal. To it she most certainly would not consent; but what else to do puzzled her, until Captain Hazlewood good-naturedly undertook to inspect the summer-house, and having assured her it was quite fit for her reception, she condescended to dismount by his aid, and take refuge in the only place where, according to her, "one could keep one's habit from being destroyed by lime and mortar, and all sorts of disagreeables."

To any one else the view from the quaint, old-fashioned building had been temptation enough to seek such a resting-place. A fertile valley lay stretched at their feet, rich in cultivation and dotted by magnificent timber, while the ever-winding river, the broad square tower of the old church at Everton catching the sunbeams, the long rows of poplars skirting the village—and by their uniformity giving a foreign air to what otherwise was so thoroughly English—combined to form as lovely a picture as one might care to see on a summer's day. But Louisa's soul was bound up in her new Adelaide-coloured riding-habit, and she saw nothing but a few threatening clouds, which she was certain presaged rain. How she wished she had gone in the carriage.

"I wish to Heaven you had," muttered the honest man, as in pity to her lamentations he went to find out whether it was gone.

"Yes, quite gone—ten minutes ago; so he hoped Miss Manners's fears were not to be realized;" and then he departed to look over the new buildings, and left her to the tender mercies of Polly Manvers, the cottager's wife, who was more terrified than honoured by having such a charge intrusted to her.

A full hour elapsed before the scattered party re-assembled, in high spirits, talking and laughing merrily, while poor Louisa was wearied to death with waiting for them, and in worse agonies than ever about the clouds, which, it must be confessed, now looked rather threatening. Indeed, a few large drops fell while they were detained a moment or two to taste Mrs. Manvers's mead, though all tried to reassure Miss Manners by insisting it could only be a passing shower—and trotted off at a round pace to escape it. But the sky

became gradually obscured, the fleecy clouds which had looked so beautiful in the distance, and had thrown such lovely shadows on the landscape darkened as they approached, till all around grew black and threatening, and the rain poured down in torrents.

"I knew how it would be," said Louisa, piteously, and almost weeping—as each drop made a huge dark circle on the fair purple dress.

"We have enough of rain from the skies," said her brother, sharply ; and, turning to Ellen, he remarked, "You had better keep the middle of the road, Miss Egerton, or Patron may put his foot in a rabbit-hole."

Hardly had this advice been acted upon, than Sir Francis rode up to say that the short grass was so slippery with the rain, he feared she would come down, unless she kept to the edge of the path. Puzzled by these contradictory directions, Ellen pulled first one rein and then the other, greatly to Patron's disgust and confusion ; while at the same moment Sir Edmund, exclaiming that the rain was in earnest now, gave his horse the rein, and quickened his pace. Patron, seeing this, took the matter into his own hands, or, more properly, the bit between his teeth, and with a single spring darted in front of Sir Edmund, taking the very middle of the road.

Afraid of the consequences, Sir Francis followed them at full speed ; and the trio dashed forward at a pace that none of the rest could equal. The rain fell faster and faster ; but the bright green of the grass, the perfume which the wet earth gave forth in gratitude for the long-desired and refreshing shower, and the excitement of careering along so swiftly, made Ellen rather enjoy the wetting she received. But cousin Frank proved in the end a true prophet, the short turf became each instant more slippery, and suddenly, without warning of any kind, Patron was down, and Ellen was thrown.

In an instant Sir Francis had pulled up, flung himself from his horse, and hastened to her assistance. Sir Edmund was less fortunate : he was not so good a rider as his friend, nor was his horse so well trained, and he was carried on at least a quarter of a mile further, at the same furious rate,

before he could stop his runaway horse. As he did so, he met Colonel Wyndham and Reginald Stanhope coming towards him from the path.

"What is the matter, Manners?" exclaimed the colonel; "you look like an evil spirit, your hat off, your hair hanging wildly about you, and your cheek as white as a fainting girl's. What on earth is the matter?"

"My horse would not pull up," he gasped; "and I tried as hard as I could, that I might help Miss Egerton."

Miss Egerton—good heavens! what has happened to her?"

Before he could explain, Reginald struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and reached the spot where the accident had taken place, almost before poor Sir Edmund had regained his composure. He found her still stretched where she had been thrown, with Sir Francis leaning over her, endeavouring by every means in his power to restore animation, but nearly terrified out of his senses to see her lie before him so still and pale.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, as Stanhope dashed up, "here is help at last. Is she dead, or only fainting?"

Reginald gently raised her in his arms, and carried her to the bank by the roadside.

"Ah! there is a slight colour in her lips. She is not dead. Thank God!—thank God!" and the rough Sir Francis fairly burst into tears as he saw her begin to revive under Stanhope's more experienced treatment. "There comes Miss Dashwood too," he exclaimed, as he turned away hastily to brush the unwonted moisture from his eyes, "so we shall be all right soon. It was only the shock—no bones broken, I am sure, from the way she was pitched off." So saying, he hurried to assure Judith and Kate that dear Ellen was already all right.

But he was as much too sanguine now as he had been the reverse a short time before. The shock had quite unnerved Ellen; and she no sooner endeavoured to sit up, and smile and say she was not hurt much, when her colour faded again, and she relapsed into insensibility.

What was to be done! How could they reach the Park,

from which they were still distant fully four miles? It was evident she could not ride home in such a state.

"Let us ride on, and send back the carriage," suggested little Kate. "We can overtake them in no time."

"No carriage could get through the path," said Judith, doubtfully; "and she is far too weak to go so far."

"There is a near cut through the wood to Vere Court," Stanhope said.

Sir Francis wrung his hand heartily at the suggestion. "The very thing, my dear fellow; and thank Heaven Mary is there. I'll gallop off and settle it all."

By this time the whole cavalcade had gathered together, and strange indeed was the scene it presented. A busy, anxious group, consisting of Stanhope, Harry, and Kate, were gathered round Judith, who, seated on the damp grass, supported Ellen in her arms; while Miss Manners, still mounted, looked down upon her, and suggested all sorts of impossible remedies for her restoration, and wished they had never come on so illstarred an expedition.

Captain Hazlewood, deserting his charge, was earnestly consulting with the colonel how they could contrive a litter to carry Miss Egerton through the tangled by-path to Vere Court; while Sir Edmund, alternately wringing his hands and abusing Louisa for having been the cause of all the mischief, formed a picture more ludicrous than attractive.

"Have you not even a scent-bottle at hand to help her, instead of sitting there looking foolish?" he said angrily.

"A scent-bottle, Edmund? How could I have a scent-bottle on horseback?"

"Well a fan or a vinaigrette, or something that might be of use. Take my hat, Stanhope, it has a wider flap than yours; or let me fan her. Do, like a good fellow; I want to do something for her."

Meanwhile Miss Manners, roused by her brother's wrath, remembered that she had a vinaigrette, and handed it to Colonel Wyndham to give to Kate. Either it or the other measures they persevered in were successful, for soon after Ellen's eyes once more unclosed, and, seeing Stanhope kneeling by her chafing her hands, she said in a whisper, "How kind you are, Reginald; I am better now." And she tried to raise herself up. This time she was more

successful than at first, and was soon so far recovered that they placed her on Kate's pony, and, with Stanhope on one side and Judith on the other, contrived to carry her to Vere Court.

CHAPTER IX.

VERE COURT.

"For something that abode endued
With temple-like repose, an air
Of life's kind purposes pursued
With order'd freedom sweet and fair.
A tent pitch'd in a world not right
It seem'd, whose inmates, every one,
On tranquil faces bore the light
Of duties beautifully done,
And humbly."

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

WHEN Ellen fully regained her consciousness, she found herself in a strange room, and surrounded by such unfamiliar objects, that she was tempted to believe it the continuation of the uncomfortable dream which had haunted her for so long. She could recall nothing save their wild race along the Ridings, and then a shock, and then a crowd of indistinct faces and voices, of which she only remembered Reginald's. His look of anxiety, his whispered words of "Ellen, my own darling Ellen," rested clear and pleasantly on her mind; all else was a wild whirling maze. And now where was she? She raised herself on her arm and looked round her. The red curtains that shaded the window were partially drawn, but a soft light found its way into the room, showing her a quaint little chamber, wainscoated with polished oak, and furnished with curious old-fashioned wardrobes and settees of the same wood, darkened with age and bright as a mirror. A few flowers were on the broad window-sill, and sitting by the little inlaid table near them was a lady of middle age, whose mild face and graceful figure seemed familiar and yet strange to her. The slight noise she made in attempting to move caused the lady to look

up. She rose, and, coming up to her with a frank and pleasant smile, said,—

“You are better now, love, are you not?” And, stooping down, she kissed her forehead.

“Much better; but where am I?” and her puzzled eyes added, “Who are you?”

The lady smiled again. “You are at Vere Court, and I am Mary Beaumont.”

“Ah, that is why your face seemed so familiar. And what has happened to me? I am still sadly confused,” and she put her hand to her brow and pushed aside the heavy curls of dark-chestnut hair that hung over her face.

“You were thrown from your horse; so they brought you here, as it was nearer than Egerton Park. Mr. Egerton is down stairs, will you see him? He cannot believe you are not much hurt.”

“Oh, I am not hurt, only shaken and weary, very weary,” she said; “still I should like to rise before seeing papa, may I not?”

“No, dear, that will not do at all. You must be kept a prisoner here for to-night, at all events.”

One night's rest, however, was not sufficient to restore Ellen to her usual strength. For nearly a week she remained at Vere Court, and spent the greater part of that time in the quaint little room into which she had been first carried. But the imprisonment was not tedious. How could it be so? when Judith and Kate, as well as Mrs. Egerton, came daily to see her; and when she had the constant society of her dear “cousin Mary.” And in the evenings, when permitted to move into the drawing-room, how pleasant it was to lie comfortably on the huge old-fashioned couch near the open window, to look out on the trim garden, with its formal beds of brilliant flowers edged by tall boxwood, and its dark alleys enclosed by holly hedges; to watch the little Beaumonts careering backwards and forwards, riding on uncle Frank's shoulder; to hear their merry voices, and feel—for the first time, poor child—that there had been one thing lacking in her happy life—the exquisite delights of family affection and family union.

Mrs. Beaumont and her brother idolized one another; they never seemed to tire of recalling their childish days,

when Vere Court had been the happy home of a large family of brothers and sisters, father and mother, all bound together by the strongest mutual affection.

"We are all that remain now," Mary said one day, with tears in her dovelike eyes; "but Mr. Beaumont knows how I like to be here, and so I and the children spend a few weeks of every summer with Frank; and we all try—Mr. Beaumont, Frank, and I—to make the rising generation as happy and as fond of the old place as we were ourselves."

"Is it not a place worth caring for, Miss Egerton?" said Sir Francis, who, tired of his exertions in romping with the children, came in to rest at the moment his sister was speaking. "Small as it is, I prefer it to all Manners's vast possessions."

"So do I," said Mary eagerly; "but," she added with a half-smile, "we must not expect Ellen to do so if half one hears in Heddlesham is true."

"I admire Manners Manor very much," answered Ellen, with a look of such perfect unconsciousness that both the brother and sister laughed heartily. "What have I said to divert you?" she asked in astonishment.

"Simply, that Kate told us to-day that Mrs. Fox has settled it that you are to be the future lady of Manners Manor, and that everything was settled the day of your expedition to the Ridings."

A peal of girlish laughter broke from Ellen's lips at this announcement.

"How could such an idea get abroad? I am sure Sir Edmund is as far from thinking of such a thing as I am."

She had no sooner uttered the words than a recollection of the high-flown terms he had used to her when Sir Francis interrupted them so opportunely, caused a burning blush to colour her cheek.

"I doubt it," said Sir Francis, curtly.

"At least, I hope so," Ellen rejoined, so seriously that Mrs. Beaumont, feeling sorry for her, said quickly,—

"At all events, Ellen dear, it is certain that you do not wish it, and that is all we care about. Is it not Frank?"

"I never believed she could," he replied, rather more solemnly than the occasion warranted. "Manners, although a far better fellow in essentials than he is generally sup-

posed to be, is not the man likely to catch our little cousin's heart. Ah, Stanhope—how are you?" he added with a sudden change of tone, as the door was thrown open and Reginald was announced; "are we not a pleasant family party? Miss Egerton is getting round famously under our care; I am only sorry they insist on carrying her away from us to-morrow."

"Mr. Egerton is very peremptory in desiring her return home," said Mrs. Beaumont; "but I don't think that though she leave Vere Court so soon, she will ever look upon us as strangers after her stay here."

"I am sure I shall not, dear cousin," Ellen answered, with brimming eyes. "I am quite grateful to Patron, poor fellow, for making us such friends."

"Ay! two days under the same roof are worth two-score meetings in full-dress," observed Sir Francis, sauntering out of the open window and snatching up one of his little nieces who had been standing near, trying by every childish wile to to bring him out among them once more. At the same moment Mrs. Beaumont, having asked Reginald to stay to tea, went into the other room to prepare it.

Thus Reginald was left alone with Ellen for the first time since her accident. They had much to say about it on both sides, and as they sat there together in the gathering twilight of that sweet summer evening, a feeling of strange happiness stole over Ellen; unlike any sensation she had ever experienced before, but so peaceful, so enchanting, that she could not repress a sigh when Mrs. Beaumont broke the happy spell by desiring her eldest daughter to bring her uncle into tea, and asking Reginald to wheel Miss Egerton's sofa into the tea-room.

"I can walk; I am quite strong to-night, I assure you," Ellen said, springing without assistance from the sofa. "I only remained a prisoner till now to please dear cousin Mary;" and putting her arm within Mrs. Beaumont's, she added, "You see I do not lean on you so heavily as I did."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Francis, as he entered, with two or three of the children hanging round him; "you are too ready to try your wings and fly away from us; nevertheless, as you are ours for one night more, you must do as we com-

mand, so let me wheel your sofa into the green parlour, and allow us for the last time to be your slaves."

In vain Ellen protested she was well—quite well. Sir Francis declared he was master in his own house, and had resolved that for once even she should obey him. And so they laughed at his pertinacity, and she took the place they assigned her and allowed herself to be waited on and petted as a spoilt child might have been; and all were as happy as light hearts and youthful spirits could make them. What a delicious evening that was! How brilliant Reginald Stanhope's sallies—how merry Ellen's laugh—how bright and sparkling, yet feminine, Mrs. Beaumont's remarks! And Sir Francis, usually so quiet and silent, how amusing he was! He laughed and talked even more than Stanhope; he jested; he even quoted poetry; and refused to have lights brought in—the soft summer twilight was so much pleasanter; "it gave one courage to go on chattering nonsense," he said.

And then he drew back the curtains from the window, that Ellen might see the strange ghostly shadows which the moonlight threw on the statues and vases scattered through the gardens, and pointed out how easily one might believe in spirits on a night like this, when the trees bowed so gently and so like life to the evening breeze. And then followed strange tales of mystery and romance, to which all contributed; and the hours flew so fast, that it was midnight before Stanhope rose up to bid good night.

"I shall see you so far," Sir Francis said; "I like a walk on such a night. So adieu, fair cousin, and may your sleep be sweet and your dreams pleasant. Alas! that this should be the last night on which you honour my poor dwelling with your presence."

Ellen cordially returned the hearty grasp of "cousin Frank's" hand, and retired to her chamber rather exhausted; and yet she had enjoyed the evening so much that she would willingly have endured far more fatigue to have had the certainty of passing so pleasant a one again. She had never till now understood why it was that Mrs. Beaumont so idolized her brother. Meeting him as she had hitherto done, she had liked him very well, but never could comprehend why her father or Mrs. Dashwood should speak of him as

clever. Now she saw he really was so. There are some men who only show to advantage when at home, or when under the influence of strong feeling. Sir Francis Vere was one of these ; but Ellen little guessed that *both* influences were at work at that time.

Often in later years she looked back to that evening, and as she recalled the difference between her vague dreams then and the realities of after-life, she murmured "God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

The two young men, meanwhile, walked on together, talking lightly of the interesting topics of the day, and exchanging jesting remarks on their acquaintance. Both seemed in high spirits, as they parted at the South Lodge leading to Egerton Park, where Stanhope was still staying ; yet each, when he found himself alone, fell into unquiet and gloomy thought.

"Ay !" said Sir Francis to himself, "she has too much sense to care for Manners, but what chance has an old rough boor like me against that fine, clever young fellow ? Ah, Frank, Frank ! put such youthful fancies out of your head, old fellow, and die a bachelor, as you always swore you would."

As Reginald strode quickly up the avenue, he repeated Sir Francis's words—"Two days spent under the same roof are worth two-score dress meetings." It was true enough. Even in the eternal bustle of Egerton Park he had found that the two days he had passed there with Ellen before her accident had been the most enjoyable he had tasted for years. She was seen to a thousand times more advantage in the comparative quiet of even such a home than in society. In a house like Vere Court she was more charming still, "and Vere seems to know it," he added, with a half-sigh. He paused as this thought forced itself upon him, and a sudden contraction of the brow showed that the idea was not quite a pleasant one. Yet why so ? He could not be jealous. He was secured against that temptation. O no, he was not in the least jealous ; but it gave him an odd feeling to think of any one understanding or appreciating Ellen as he did. Yet it was natural they should—Sir Francis above

all men. He had sense to see her worth; to perceive the lovely jewel the fair casket contained. And his brow relaxed as he said half aloud, "If I feel how enchanting her presence is—I, who can only look upon her as a most dear friend, why should I be startled to find that he does so also? He, who—though I doubt whether either of them is conscious of it—has far deeper and more tender feelings towards her. His expression of agony at the time he saw her lying senseless on the ground before him, I never can forget."

And then he began to speculate on Sir Francis's character. It was not one seen at a glance—of that he was well aware; for at first he had himself been prejudiced against him by his gruff voice and blunt manner; but one or two instances, that had come to his knowledge, of the good effected among men of his own standing by the example he had given of high principle and the strictest and most scrupulous adherence to duty, had taught Reginald to respect his really noble nature, while the emotion he had shown at the time of Ellen's accident had betrayed to him the soft heart that lay hid under his rough exterior. "I could bear to see her *his* wife," Reginald said at last, and then, with a smothered sigh, he quickened his pace, and soon reached his destination.

CHAPTER X.

THE REPRESENTATIVE.

"Why did the Pilot, too confiding,
Dream o'er that ocean's foam,
And trust in Pleasure's careless guiding
To bring his vessel home?" E. BRONTE.

"You are late, Reginald," said Mr. Egerton, good-humouredly, as, opening the library door, he called him to come in for a moment before he went to bed."

"Yes," he answered, "I walked over to Vere Court, and the time passed so swiftly, I found it midnight when I thought I had been scarcely an hour absent."

"And Ellen is better?"

"Almost well. She will be quite ready for you by noon to-morrow."

"Was Frank at home?"

"Oh, yes! he was the life of our little party. I never knew any one improve so much as he does on acquaintance."

Mr. Egerton grasped the young man's hand, and said heartily, "I am glad you think so. I am glad it is no old man's fancy. I love Francis Vere as if he were my own son, and it gratifies me to find him appreciated. And Mary! how do you like Mary? Mrs. Beaumont I mean."

"I have seldom been more favourably impressed with any one at first sight."

"I wanted her and my Ellen to be friends. It is odd enough that I owe it to that confounded fool Louisa Manners that she is so; but, since Ellen is all right, I can scarcely regret the chance which threw her as it were into Mary's arms. What a strange life this is, Stanhope! How little we can guess what good may come out of evil. Still I am glad that the Mannerses leave to-morrow. I am worried to death of them, and I suspect even Mrs. Egerton must have had a sickening of them."

"Sir Edmund," suggested Stanhope, with a half-laugh, "is very good-natured."

"The puppy—good-natured! We all know that mere good-nature is a fool; but let me warn you, Stanhope, not to trust to that if you wound Edmund Manners's vanity. His good-nature would vanish then like snow in thaw. But I did not mean to keep you out of bed merely to hear me prate of Edmund Manners's peculiarities. Nor will I, beyond telling you that I thank you and Hazlewood for the aid you have given me in getting through this tedious week. I feel you have both been hardly dealt with; but it could not be helped—and I hope that you will be able to contrive to come to us again when Ellen is at home, and we have pleasanter guests."

Stanhope most heartily thanked him for this promise, and was about to express how little he felt entitled to such kindness, when Mr. Egerton interrupted him.

"Nonsense, my boy! You are the son of the dearest friend of my dead wife. You have known Ellen since she was an infant, so you have claims on me. Besides, I like

you, Reginald. You understand me ; you can talk and think like a man, not a puppy ; and it pleases me to see you here as often as you can spare time to come. So mind you, I am to hear no more nonsense about kindness. It is kindness to us. We all like you, and the more you make yourself at home at the Park, the better we shall be pleased."

Stanhope was so affected by the manner in which this was said, that for an instant he hesitated how to reply. Before he could recover himself, Mr. Egerton said abruptly, "By the way, have either you or Hazlewood received tickets for the Daventry's fancy ball, this day week?"

"Yes ; both of us."

"I am heartily glad to hear it, as I want you both to take charge of Mrs. Egerton and the girls. I really cannot undergo another of those weary affairs."

As Reginald left him, Mr. Egerton said to himself, "Well, that is managed. If I can once get Charlotte to see that younger squires are of more use than I am, she will let me creep into my shell again."

The next day Ellen returned home. It was the last evening of the Mannerses' visit, and as she compared the glare of light, the buzz of voices, the turmoil, as it seemed to her, of that night with the one which had preceded it, she wished what she had never wished before, that Egerton Park were not what it was. How came a four days' absence so to open her eyes to the deficiencies of home? Simply that Vere Court and its inmates had given her a glimpse of a better world than that in which she had hitherto moved—had shown her that there are realities and duties in life which give zest to its amusements, and had taught her—although as yet she was unconscious of the lesson—that she was fitted for better things than the hollow, worldly, useless existence she was now leading. A few serious conversations with a right-thinking, gentle woman, a little insight into the good that was done by an active man impressed with a sense of his responsibilities to God and man, had produced this great change upon her.

It is true that the impression made upon her at Vere Court was, for the moment, weakened by her return to worldly pleasures and occupations, but it was never entirely effaced ; and a time came at last when the little seed grew

up into a great tree that bore good fruit to herself and others.

Meanwhile the only perceptible result of her accident was the steady friendship it had begun between herself and Mrs. Beaumont—a friendship which Mr. Egerton did his best to encourage. Almost every day he found some excuse for inviting the brother and sister to the Park, or for riding over to Vere Court with Ellen. Sometimes he professed a wish to consult Frank on an agricultural difficulty; sometimes he openly acknowledged his longing for a chat with Mary. At all events, the chat always took place, whatever befell the consultation, and was often followed by a move to the garden, where young and old gathered together on the smooth lawn, and had as merry a game at romps as it was possible to conceive.

But Vere Court was the only place now to which Mr. Egerton could be induced to go.

"No, no, love," he said, in answer to Ellen's persuasions; "I am tired of constantly gadding about and making an old fool of myself by going to all their *déjeuners* and *fêtes* and nonsense. I am always glad to see anybody who chooses to come to Egerton Park, but am far too old to stravague about the country, doing the amiable to people I don't care a straw for."

Ellen was disappointed; but experience had taught her that when once her father had decided to follow his own wishes not even his great affection for her could induce him to relinquish them. When she first arrived at Egerton Park Mrs. Dashwood had warned her that it would be so. Ellen had not believed her, even though it made her wince when she added, "My child, you do not yet understand your father." But she now confessed that Mrs. Dashwood was right. She loved, she admired him with her whole heart, but she made no progress towards a more intimate knowledge of his opinions or wishes than she had gleaned in the first few days of their being together, nor was there between them any of that holy confidence which is the greatest happiness to a parent, the greatest earthly safeguard to a child.

He was the most indulgent of fathers, overwhelming her with presents, forwarding every scheme of amusement for

her benefit ; but there his notions of parental duty ended. It never occurred to him that he was bound to repair, by his own personal exertions, his wife's failures in domestic duty. He disliked the life of idleness and vanity into which Ellen had been introduced, but instead of weaning her from it by substituting some more wholesome interest, or, if that were impossible, overcoming his own indolence so far as to be to her the guide and protector her step-mother could not be—he simply refused to accompany her to what was distasteful to him, and handed over to a stranger the responsibilities which ought to have been his alone. At first this was done with some little hesitation, but by-and-by he found it such an easy way of getting out of his difficulties that he made not the slightest scruple in sending Reginald as his representative anywhere or at any time when he himself did not feel inclined to be present.

On the afternoon of the Mannesers' departure from the Park, and before Reginald returned to barracks, he had been comparing his engagements for the week with Ellen. To this conversation Mr. Egerton appeared to pay no attention, till he suddenly startled his wife by exclaiming,—

"By the way, Charlotte, did Reginald tell you that I have intrusted him to take care of you and Ellen at the Daventrys? As you may be late in returning, he must sleep here ; so see that his room is prepared for him. You see," turning to him, "that I consider you completely under orders. Luckily, it is part of your trade to make yourself agreeable, so you ought to take to it more readily than I can do."

Stanhope laughed, and confessed it was a great matter when duty and inclination could be so well combined—and no more was said. But the first step was taken ; and as it is only the first that is difficult, it soon came to be "Reginald, my wife wants me to drive her and the girls over to the Desmonds ; some tiresome picnic or other. Do go in my stead." Or, "Stanhope, my good friend, these people bore me to death ; I wish you would make a diversion in my favour. Suggest a move to the billiard-room, will you ? and I shall slip away meanwhile. I want to ride over to the Folly to see the ponies Mannes mentioned to you for Ellen's pony-carriage. Tell Mrs. Egerton what has become of me."

At first Mrs. Egerton was a little cross to find Reginald selected to fill her husband's place in escorting her and her daughter; for though she had long expected that he himself should prove restive—indeed, had been surprised that he had not become so long before this time—she could not see why he chose Reginald to act in his stead. The answer was not easily given. Mr. Egerton himself scarcely knew *why* he had done so. It was an impulse of the moment; but the result was so far satisfactory, that after a few evenings' experience of his care, Mrs. Egerton allowed the choice was a good one. He took the very greatest care both of her and of Ellen, and yet "he knew his place"—a phrase which, interpreted by Mrs. Egerton's dictionary, implied a great deal, but especially that he never interfered with any of her pet schemes. Captain Hazlewood did sometimes; he would ask Ellen to dance at the very moment that Colonel Wyndham was coming towards her for a like purpose. Sir Francis Vere often did; twice he had carried Ellen off to supper when others of far more importance were "almost" in the act of doing so. He often, as if on purpose, contrived to join in the conversation when Sir Edmund Manners stationed himself to talk to Ellen during a waltz—Ellen stupidly never would waltz. Reginald never did any of these stupid things. Then, Reginald knew how to put on her cloak without crushing her blonde. In short, she must confess Mr. Egerton's selection had shown more judgment than she at first supposed.

And what did the world think on the subject? Why, by this time they were so accustomed to consider Stanhope as *l'enfant de la maison*, that they simply thought it one of Mr. Egerton's odd ways of acting. Mrs. Fox discovered that the servants spoke of him as "only Mr. Stanhope;" and she knew for a fact that his room at the Park was one of the little upper rooms where they never put grand guests—though, to be sure, that room was kept for him whoever else was expected.

To Reginald himself his present position was very agreeable. But was it safe? That was a question he seldom chose to dwell upon, though he still persuaded himself that it was quite so. His own fate in life being fixed, it was no longer a question whether it was exactly what he would

now have chosen. It *was* fixed, and there was an end of it ; and the knowledge that such was the case gave him a confidence in himself, a freedom of action, which in other circumstances he might not have had. But for this he might have hesitated to undertake the position with which Mr. Egerton had intrusted him. As it was, he ran no risk ; on the contrary, it was of use to him to be forced into such close contact with the world. His natural temperament led him to look on men and things too gloomily, so that it did him good to be forced out of his recluse habits, his misanthropic fancies ; and though it was trying to be obliged to bear patiently with the folly and crass stupidity of some of the people he met in society, still one ought to learn to be good-natured, even to brainless men and women ; and the friendship of such fellows as Hazlewood and Vere, and such women as Mrs. Beaumont, Miss Dashwood, and Ellen, recompensed him for all the rest.

Dear Ellen—what a true child of nature she was ! How unconscious of evil, how single-minded she was ! Mr. Egerton evidently had not a conception of her ignorance of the commonest worldly lore ; so it might be of real use to her his being with her at this trying time of her life, launched as she was on the stream of life, youth at the helm, and pleasure at the prow ; what could be expected but that she should run foul of some rock, or sink in some unscen quicksand, unless there were some hand to guide her, some strong arm to guard her. Mrs. Floyd had treated him like a son. It was his part now to treat Ellen as a brother ; and so he would—so he had. He never shrank from advising her as he would have done a sister ; and as a sister she received and listened to his counsels. People might say what they pleased, but such friendships might subsist between a man and woman without going further ; ay, so they might, Reginald, when a more powerful attachment turns their hearts in some other direction ; if not, it too often happens that friendship takes wings to itself, and leaves love in its place, and then woe betide one or both.

Had Reginald and Ellen that safeguard ? Who can tell ?

CHAPTER XI.

THE PORTRAIT.

"Touch not the nettle lest that it burn thee,
Waly sae green as the bracken grows ;
Loe no the lass that ye canna get,
For the bands o' love are ill to loose."

SIR W. SCOTT.

AMONG the other pleasant social evenings at Egerton Park, there was, once in every three or four weeks, an assembly which hitherto greatly annoyed the lady of the house ; but no persuasions could induce Mr. Egerton to give it up. For more than twenty years he had been in the habit of gathering together those of his neighbours who sympathized with his love of agriculture and experimental farming. Of course the parties were not very select—knowledge rather than station being the requisite for admission to the meetings, to which Kate had given the name of "The Agricultural Society."

Formerly Mrs. Egerton had declared that these dinners were not fit for ladies to be present at ; but when she learned that Colonel Wyndham and Captain Hazlewood had both asked permission to attend them, and that Sir Edmund Manners's greatest ambition was to be elected a member, she resolved to patronize them, and not only take the head of the table herself, but persuade Ellen, and as many other ladies "of their own set" as possible, to keep her in countenance.

They readily agreed, on the understanding that they might retire to the drawing-room before the gentlemen embarked on too learned discussions ; and as one or two of the honorary members, especially Hazlewood and Stanhope, generally joined them early, the agricultural evenings were generally allowed to be among the pleasantest of the many spent at the Park.

All formality was done away with then : some strolled in the gardens ; some sought the music-room ; while others,

more favoured still, were admitted into the pretty little boudoir which Mrs. Egerton had fitted up solely for Ellen, where her drawing-table, her favourite books, and her pretty Welsh harp, with its double row of strings, were left always ready for use. This charming little room was at one end of the long drawing-room—indeed, formed a part of it, being only a very deep recess, some twelve feet square, opening into the conservatory on one side; two others were filled up by large windows; while the fourth was only separated from the drawing-room by a Venetian blind, which, when closed, completely deceived the uninitiated into the idea that it was a window-blind, not the entrance to another room.

This was Ellen's favourite resort; and many a pleasant chat had she and Judith Dashwood, and more lately Mrs. Beaumont, had there, reclining on the soft divan by the low window, and enjoying the comparative seclusion and silence it afforded from the buzz of voices in the drawing-room when Mrs. Egerton was there.

The first "agricultural meeting" that took place after Ellen's accident was very fully attended, and she had to undergo many congratulations on her hairbreadth escape. Sir Edmund Manners was most earnest in his expressions of delight at seeing her so much better. "She did look so wretchedly ill the night she returned from Vere Court; but now she was recovered, he trusted her accident would not discourage her from visiting the Ridings hereafter. He could assure her that really he had had very pleasant 'ridings' there,—ha, ha, ha!—an irresistible pun, was it not?" And then he took her down to dinner, and talked so much, and devoted himself to her so conspicuously, that she felt heartily glad when her stepmother made an early move from the dinner-table, and she could relieve her mind to Mrs. Beaumont on the subject of the annoyance she had suffered.

"I fear, my love, you will have no peace until you let him come to the point," was her answer; "he is one of the people who cannot take a hint; and, say what you will, he has evidently arranged that you are to be Lady Manners."

"It is such a comfort that neither you nor your brother do me the injustice of supposing I shall be," said Ellen timidly.

"I wish, my love, that every one were as convinced of

that as we are ; but you must not expect it. Mrs. Egerton evidently favours his pretensions, and, I fear, will not easily forgive you if you refuse him."

"Do not say so, Mary," Ellen began, when a summons from her stepmother to the drawing-room interrupted her.

"Ellen, my love, I promised Sir Edmund Manners that you should let him hear your Welsh harp to-night. He was complaining bitterly that he was the only one among your friends who had never heard you play."

"I fear I shall not get my harp in tune," she replied, anxious to escape the exhibition (for it *was* one when Sir Edmund was present), "the thundery weather has snapped several of the strings."

"Try, love."

She was still endeavouring, with Judith's assistance, to string up her harp, when Captain Hazlewood and Reginald entered. Mrs. Egerton was reclining on a sofa, "exhausted by the heat of the evening," she said ; while Kate and Mrs. Beaumont were turning over a scrap-book, which Kate called her book of beauty and ugliness, most of the sketches in which were by Stanhope. The sound of the harp tuning caused Captain Hazlewood to offer his services in screwing up the larger strings. Reginald, looking tired and ill, seated himself at the table near Kate, and, taking up a pencil, began—as he often did—to draw caricatures of their acquaintance. The child watched him for a time with some interest, at last she exclaimed,—

"Well, Reginald, you can draw very well, and sing very well too ; but can you do anything else ?"

"I hope so," he said languidly.

"Tell me what. They say you are a great student,—at least, were,—for I don't think you have done much in that way since we knew you ; but what good has it done you ?"

"Taught me my own ignorance," he answered, with a slight smile.

"A very modest answer," Mrs. Beaumont said, jestingly ; "but I do not hear other people accuse you of that, Mr. Stanhope. You ought to tell Kate of the praise lately bestowed on that pamphlet I hear so much of."

"Kate knows nothing of mathematics and science," he said quickly ; then added more seriously, "besides, she is

quite right : I have not of late been the student I was, or that I ought to be. However, the present is but a short holiday ; I shall soon have to resume life in earnest."

The tone in which he spoke caused Mrs. Beaumont to look at him more keenly than her soft eyes generally looked at any one ; but the evening he had spent at Vere Court had interested her in his favour, and there was a touch of almost motherly sympathy in her voice as she said, "I do hope, Mr. Stanhope, that nothing has occurred to annoy you to-day ? There is no idea, is there, of the 20th leaving Heddlesham soon ?"

"Oh no," he answered, "I have no such apology for my stupidity. Kate is quite right in saying that I am not of much use in the world ; the mere exposure to the sun, on duty to-day, has given me a headache."

A strange smile on his face made Mrs. Beaumont fancy that this answer was not a true one, or at least not all the truth ; but before she could make any observation, Kate said, "I did not mean, Reginald, that you were of no use in the world—only not of the same kind of use as others ; for instance, 'the honest man' can do many things you cannot. He mended mamma's work-frame, as nobody else could have done ; he dresses hooks better than the fishing tackle people do ; he catches fish with them when they are made. By the way, did you hear he actually caught some to-day, this thundery day, till Sir Edmund came and frightened them all away with his loud talking ?"

"Kate, my love, don't talk nonsense," said Mrs. Egerton from the sofa.

"It is really true, mamma ; the fish were taking like anything before—were not they Harry ? Where is Hal gone ? Oh, helping 'the honest man' to settle that troublesome harp. I am sure I shall never learn the harp ; it worries one so—breaking strings and all that. But that reminds me of what I was saying : the honest man can mend harp-strings, make baskets, nets, everything that is useful—you can't."

"Mr. Stanhope uses his head more than his hands, and Captain Hazlewood his hands more than his head, perhaps," whispered Mrs. Beaumont ; and then she blushed a little, on finding the latter had overheard her. But he did not seem annoyed by the remark ; he only smiled, as he asked

her to play one little bit of that concerto of Beethoven's they had tried over the other night, and then they should see who could use their hands to best purpose.

Kate laughed at his retort, and asked Reginald if he could have been as good-humoured.

"I think I should if I had as light a heart as Hazlewood."

"Really, Reginald, you are worse than I thought you. What sort of a husband do you think you will make if you have low spirits and useless hands?"

The words were the silly pratings of a forward child, but he reddened as he said, "I doubt whether I should make a good one, Kate. I have often suspected as much myself, but perhaps you could teach me?" The last question was spoken with effort, as if resolved to shake off the depression which was gradually stealing over him.

"I teach you, Reginald? I am the very worst person you could apply to. I know nothing of 'domesticities,' as the housekeeper calls them. But Ellen does; at least Mrs. Brown says she has a very pretty notion of preserves and jellies, so you had better apply to Ellen or Mrs. Beaumont—she knows lots of things." And then the child laughed as she imagined what a strange mess Reginald and she would make of housekeeping if they were to set up an establishment together. "In short," she concluded, "I would rather have you for a brother than a husband. I would not be your wife for all the world."

He made no answer, but his sunburnt cheek grew sensibly deeper in colour, as, resuming his pencil, he began to sketch something very rapidly on the paper before him. It was evident, however, that he was scarcely conscious of what he was doing, for when Kate exclaimed "I do think I never saw a more beautiful face!" he glanced at what he had been doing, muttered, "It does not do her justice;" then crumpling it up in his hand, flung it into the empty grate.

Kate's angry words, "What a shame!" were unheard, as he sprang up in answer to a summons from Ellen to come and sing "*Mira quell' bianca luna*" with her. Judith Dashwood took his vacant seat, and was carelessly turning over Kate's scrap-book when Captain Hazlewood came up.

"Stanhope certainly catches a likeness with great readi-

ness," he observed, as she pointed out to him a caricature of Colonel Wyndham and Miss Winterton waltzing; "the very twist of the colonel's moustache shows he is doing the agreeable with all his might."

"Is it not the very way he looks when Ellen is singing?" said Kate, "and whispers to mamma that her voice is like *Rubini's*!" and Kate laughed heartily at the good colonel's ignorance.

"That is Miss Manners to the life."

"I do think the turn of her head is the best thing Reginald ever did. See how her eyes look out from below her eyelashes, so modest and timid and retiring."

"Kate, my dear," called out her mother again, "you are learning to be disagreeably forward."

"Yes, I know, ma, dear. But it does not signify much, nobody likes me the worse for it," answered the precocious young lady. And then she said, in a lower voice, "One would not mind the thing being ugly in itself if one did not know that she sees all that is going on just as well as if she looked one straight in the face. I do so detest affectation; and, besides, I have heard papa say that you can never trust any one who does not look you straight in the face."

"Mr. Egerton is quite right," answered Captain Hazlewood. "It is an old saying, but a true one, that 'the tongue may deceive, but the eyes never!'"

"Are you sure it is true?" Kate asked.

"I believe it."

"Well, Reginald does not look you straight in the face, yet you believe him, don't you?"

"There is no rule without an exception," Judith said, with a laugh. "And as for Mr. Stanhope's eyes, he can scarcely help giving you a veiled look now and then, his eyelashes are so thick and long."

"I can answer for it," said his friend earnestly, "he can look *a man* in the face; and when he does it in displeasure, I had rather not be in that man's shoes."

"I am glad to hear it. I should not like not to be able to trust him," said Kate, with a sigh of relief. "But here is my especial prize—Sir Edmund, the great Panjandrum himself. Is he not the very image of a pouter pigeon, with that absurd air about him as he stands on one foot ready to

turn over Ellen's music, and always turning two leaves at once?"

"Kate!" again exclaimed Mrs. Egerton, and this time quite sharply, "I do wish you would be quiet, I cannot hear the singing."

Kate's voice sank into a whisper as she said, "I have only one other thing to show you, but it is such a beauty I could not help stealing it."

"This is no caricature," exclaimed both Judith and Captain Hazlewood at once. "Who is it Kate; is it a portrait?"

"I can't tell, I dare not ask. The truth is, he flung it away just now, and I picked it up the moment his back was turned. Is it not beautiful?"

Like Stanhope's other sketches, the drawing in question was very slight, a few delicate lines alone shadowing forth the outline of a female head; but the pure oval of the face, the chiselled features, wavy hair, and large dark eye were sufficiently indicated to give one the idea of a very lovely woman, or rather girl, for there was youth displayed in each rounded line, although the expression of the countenance was melancholy.

"Is it not worth stealing?" said the child again. "I am so afraid he should take it from me, that I mean to hide it in this little side pocket. Come, 'honest man,' give it me," and she snatched it from his hand, as Reginald, having finished his song, joined the group round the table.

"What is going on here?" he asked in some astonishment, at the look of confusion that seemed to fall on them all as he came up. "And what are you trying to hide from me, you little gipsy?" he added, playfully catching Kate's hand, as she tried to thrust the stolen property into its hiding-place.

"Oh, only your sketch."

"What sketch?"

"The one you threw away," said Kate, boldly. "I thought it pretty, and so I took it and mean to keep it." The child's dark expressive face assumed a determined air as she said this, but her flushed cheek and quivering lip showed that she was wrong, and knew it.

"Very well, Kate; do so if you please," he said, turning

away ; "but it is not like you to keep a thing which you are aware was not intended for you."

For a moment Kate hesitated, her naturally generous impulses struggling with more objectionable feelings, but at the moment Sir Edmund Manners entered the room and walked directly towards the table, and afraid lest he should ask to see the contents of her scrap-book, she hastily thrust the sketch into its pocket, and closing the spring-lock began to draw houses on the paper before her.

"Ah!" said Sir Edmund, blandly, "making this a *drawing* room as usual, Miss Kate! ha, ha! I have not forgotten that old joke. I always tell my mother that Egerton Park was the first place where I learnt the signification of the word. Had any music to-night, Miss Dashwood?" and he flung himself down on the sofa by her side. "I do hope I am not too late to hear Miss Egerton's harp. I have been bored to death with the talk down stairs, and so I stole away, hoping to be soothed by the concord of sweet sounds."

"Miss Egerton is still in the music-room," said Mrs. Egerton, before Judith could answer.

"And I may seek her? Thanks, Mrs. Egerton. You feel for me. You know the intensity of my love for 'Music, heavenly maid,'" and he disappeared into the music room.

Reginald, who had been standing by the window, looked after him with a frown. "It cannot be," he muttered. "Not such a man as that. Her father would not permit it;" and turning from the brightly lighted room he gazed out on the placid night-scene, and lost himself in thought.

He was roused from his abstraction by Kate, who, laying her hand gently on his arm, said, "You are still angry with me I fear."

"Angry, Kitten? No! why should I?"

"For stealing your sketch. But here it is; I only kept it because I wanted Ellen to see it. She likes your lady faces so much. I was going to tell you this, but Sir Edmund came in just then, so I got cross, and did not."

Reginald smiled. He felt perhaps that Kate was not the only one of the party on whom Sir Edmund's appearance had produced that effect; but he answered, "I would rather,

Kate, that you did not show this sketch to your sister. I shall make you a much prettier one for her."

"But I like this so much."

He was vexed at her persistence, and said hastily, "I told you it did the original injustice. That is not half so pretty as she is."

"Then it is not a fancy picture?"

"Not quite."

"What is her name?"

"Terese."

"What more?"

"Let that content you for the present, Kitten;" and taking the picture from her reluctant fingers, he tore it to shreds.

"Why did you do that?"

"For a reason that I have, as the Irish say."

"You really *are* angry with me, Reginald?"

"No, indeed, Kitten."

"Your eyes look so, and the 'honest man' says the eyes never deceive," said Kate, with all a child's perversity.

He grew very pale, but repeated, "I am not angry, only tired; very, very tired, so I had better go home without waiting for Hazlewood. Pray, Kate, tell him I am gone. I do not wish to disturb the party in the music-room."

"Ellen will be quite disappointed. She wanted you to sing 'Touch not the nettle' to papa, when he came up."

"If I could sing anything, it would be that, Kate," he said pointedly; "but indeed I am too ill to-night. Tell your sister that I will call to-morrow and apologize for my sudden flight. No, not to-morrow, I am on duty—but the day after. Good night, Kate."

The child was pained and puzzled by his nervous manner and sudden departure, both so unlike his usual good-nature, but conscious that she was herself in some degree the cause of his discomposure, she resolved never again to allude to the sketch, not even to tell Ellen about it. And she kept her resolution with all save Harry, to whom she confided the whole history, and asked him who Terese could possibly be.

"Oh!" said Harry, with the off-hand decision of his age, "some girl he used to flirt with long ago, I suppose, and wants to forget now."

"O yes, that must be it. Thank you, Harry!"

CHAPTER XII.

A DISCOVERY.

"The heart is a garden, and youth is its spring, and hope is its sunshine, and love is a thorny plant that grows up and bears one bright flower that has nothing like it in all the earth."—G. P. R. JAMES.

REGINALD returned to his quarters that night in no enviable state of mind. Till now he had contrived to persuade himself that he cared no more for Ellen than as one old friend cares for another, and fancied that if she made a worthy choice he should rejoice rather than regret to see her married, but the trifling incidents of the evening had taught him to know himself better. It was not simply because Sir Edmund Manners was a shallow-pated fool that he now disliked him so thoroughly, for he was not a whit sillier now than he had been from the first, but because everybody said that he had pretensions to Ellen's hand ; because he saw that Mrs. Egerton encouraged him ; and, worst of all, because Ellen treated him, as she treated everybody, with courtesy. Could she like the creature ? Could she be biassed by his wealth and position ? No, he did not do her the injustice of supposing such a thing. Yet, not only Sir Edmund, but all who saw Ellen Egerton were entitled to express their admiration ; nay more, their love for that charming girl, while he must stand aloof, and look on, unable to enter the lists with them ! He was not coxcomb enough to take it for granted that he could succeed, even if he were entitled to try it, but to be debarred by a mere scruple of honour, to be kept back because—because he had pledged his faith in an idle hour to a girl he did not love. It was very hard ; yet he was bound in honour to hold to his pledge, for she was an orphan, and unprotected, and he had sworn to give her a home as soon as his circumstances enabled him to support a wife. What mattered it that he had fallen into a trap laid for him ? that he had committed himself unconsciously : he had since solemnly given his word of honour to hold to the promise he had at first too rashly given. He could not

draw back now, unless *she* did so first. She had neither had art nor part in the painful entanglement; it was her aunt's doing and *his own*. His pleasant follies were indeed the whips that had scourged him.

Nor till he had renewed his acquaintance with Ellen had he altogether regretted his engagement. Sometimes he had almost rejoiced that there was—however accidentally—one person in the world who had a claim upon him; one who might owe happiness to his exertions; and she was beautiful too! a cold marble beauty,—still it was beauty,—and she was so gentle, poor girl, that if they had married years ago, perhaps they might have been happy. How he hated Mrs. Markham for having prevented the marriage taking place at once. It was true there were difficulties in the way. It would have been difficult to live comfortably on his lieutenant's pay; and the remnant of his once tolerable fortune was hardly sufficient to pay his debts. This he acknowledged, as he also acknowledged the wisdom of exchanging into a less extravagant regiment than the one he had been in when they were betrothed. Still, to insist on delaying the marriage till he got his troop, and yet so peremptorily enforcing silence as to his engagement, was wrong, quite wrong in every point of view. He ought to have stood out against it; but, alas! he had not done so.

Mrs. Markham was a most plausible woman. What she said was always well said; what she determined she generally effected, not by blustering or threats, but by steady, unswerving resolution to gain her point, either by straight means or crooked ones, and to the latter she had such a power of giving a specious appearance, that in her hands wrong was apt to seem right. It was so in the present instance, for though Stanhope intuitively felt that her arguments, though right in theory were wrong in practice, he found it impossible to gainsay them. There was but one point at which he had made a stand. She had endeavoured to prevent any correspondence between her niece and him during their separation from each other; but to that he would not agree. It was unjust to both that they should be deprived of this only means of becoming better acquainted; and Mrs. Markham gave in on condition that the correspondence should be carried on with moderation

and the letters should be sent under cover to herself. She made this stipulation, she said, simply because she wished her niece to be made as little conspicuous as possible until the time appointed for her to join her husband should be nearer at hand. The secret as yet was safe, but would not be so long if perpetual love-letters passed through a regimental post-office.

As Terese made no objection to this arrangement—as she declined all Stanhope's entreaties to take some part in the decision of her future fate, with the same calm impassibility which had throughout struck him as so peculiar, and which had acquired for her in the regiment the name of the "Snow-drop"—he found himself obliged to consent with as good a grace as he could to all Mrs. Markham's stipulations.

The correspondence which after his exchange into the 20th had been begun on his side with eagerness, was so ill maintained on that of his betrothed, that in spite of his efforts it languished, and at last came to be a mere exchange of commonplaces once or twice in the six months. He still continued to address her as his plighted wife; still spoke of looking forward to the happiness of a home; but the fond dreams he had once indulged of learning to know her better by correspondence faded away.

His disappointment in Terese's coldness, together with his eagerness to wean himself from all idle companions, led him to seek in study the interest and excitement which till then had been wasted on the wildest caprices, the maddest and most hairbrained exploits, and, fortunately for him, he found himself thrown among a set of officers who encouraged rather than laughed at his studious tastes. Captain Hazlewood was a most valuable friend, and by his good offices and those of Colonel Wyndham he was enabled to resume the course of distinction he had begun at Oxford, but left unfulfilled to enter the army. His long leave was always spent at the university, and at length he was enabled to take his degree. That this object was not attained without difficulty may be easily imagined; but it was not as a mere distinction that he desired to append the magic "M.A., Oxon." to his name. In spite of the strictest economy, his debts still harassed him. He had long looked to authorship as a means of ridding himself of the incubus, and knew enough

of the world to be aware that his Oxford degree would be of importance in any literary attempt he might make. He was not disappointed. The magical letters drew attention to one or two clever scientific pamphlets he published, and their success was so marked, that he was encouraged to persevere in the same course. But it was his bane never to do anything in moderation. He worked without relaxation, and the stress on his brain was too great for his physical strength. He fell ill, was forbidden the slightest mental exertion for the next two or three months, and was advised to spend as much time as possible on horseback or in pleasant society. Colonel Wyndham insisted on his complying with these orders to the very letter; and, in spite of his reluctance, carried him with him to the assize ball, where he met Ellen.

To a man recovering from depressing illness there was something ineffably refreshing in the society of such a bright, innocent, affectionate creature; and the readiness with which she resumed their old familiar intimacy at Penmorfa revived all his brotherly feelings towards her, without suggesting any fears for the future from their friendship. And at first it seemed as if none were necessary, so unselfish was his delight in drawing forth her fresh, innocent thoughts, in hearing her speak so unconstrainedly of herself and all around her; and especially did he enjoy the going back with her to their childhood's days, and forget, in thinking of them, that he was no longer a boy, but a toil-worn, world-worn man. And when the remembrance of Terese did cross his mind, he amused himself with thinking what a curious contrast there was between her and Ellen, and in speculating whether they were ever likely to meet or to be friends. That was all for a long, long time. The intimacy with the Egertons increased so gradually—Hazlewood seeming at first almost as much there as himself, and Sir Francis Vere much more so—that there was nothing to warn him of the peril to which he was exposed. Ellen's accident was the first thing that startled him into some approach to a consciousness of his danger; but even then his sincere sympathy with Sir Francis misled him as to his own feelings, which he still believed to be mere friendship. And yet a vague feeling of the truth made him resolve to find some excuse for with-

drawing himself gradually from the very great degree of intimacy that had lately made him spend every disengaged moment at the Park. He was well now and able to resume his literary labours. This thought was in his mind when Mr. Egerton demanded his escort for his wife and daughters to the Daventrys' ball. Such an inducement caused him to delay his return to his studies for another week ; without rudeness he could not decline such a charge ; and one single week could make little difference.

His good resolution once shaken—this new bond once knitted between him and his friends—he found it difficult to act as he had originally intended ; and instead of being less at Egerton Park than formerly, he was, if possible, a more frequent guest there than before.

About this time the gossip about Sir Edmund's attentions to Ellen became prevalent. He found that Mrs. Egerton, instead of checking, did her utmost to encourage such reports, and to hint that what was still only a chance was already a certainty. At last it was so openly spoken of as a settled thing that even Reginald began to fear that, as Mrs. Brudenell more graphically than elegantly expressed it, "where there was so much smoke there must be some fire." The mere possibility of such a thing fretted him ; but why it did so was not fully forced upon his mind, until one day when Colonel Wyndham took him aside with some mystery, and whispered to him that he had just learned that Major Brown was to sell out at once. Stanhope would therefore have his troop six months at least before he had expected it.

Little did the kind-hearted colonel imagine the blow inflicted by his well meant intelligence. Reginald turned ghastly pale, staggered to a seat, and then, making a violent effort to recover himself, grasped his friend's hand, and stammered out, "I thank you, colonel."

"Why, what is wrong with you, my good fellow ? You look worse than before your illness."

Stanhope passed his hand across his forehead, and said hesitatingly, "I have felt ill all day. Thunder always makes me as nervous as a girl. And your news is so unexpected," he added more cordially.

"And welcome too, I trust ?"

"How can you doubt it? I deeply feel your friendliness in telling me so soon."

"By the way, don't mention it just yet. It is settled, you know; but Brown, poor fellow, wants it kept quiet for a week or two."

"Certainly, I shall keep his secret. You go to the park to-night?"

"No. I forgot it was an agricultural dinner, and engaged myself to the Wintertons. They are such nice people, the Wintertons," he added timidly.

"Albina is very handsome," suggested Stanhope, with a slight smile.

"Ay, confound her, desperately handsome; I wish she were less so." And Colonel Wyndham looked very uncomfortable. "The people here do talk so. One cannot exchange two words with a pretty girl, but one is supposed to have lost one's heart." And the colonel went off on the sore subject of Heddlesham tattling, and forgot Stanhope's sudden seizure, or believed it was the thunder which had so strange an effect on a fine strong young fellow of six feet high.

They tell us that a man recovered from death by drowning has been heard to say that in the instant between life and death the whole of his previous existence flashed before him in one instant of time, that all he had ever thought or done amiss rushed upon his recollection in its true colours, unbiassed by any of the gloss through which we are apt to see our sins. In like manner the one instant of faintness that came over Stanhope, after listening to Colonel Wyndham's news, seemed to place before him, as in a mirror, all the folly of which he had been guilty with regard to Ellen. Trusting in his own strength, he had rushed into danger, and had fallen at the very moment of fancied security. The shams of childish intimacy and brotherly interest vanished away; he who was to prove to the world that simple friendship can subsist even in such exceptional circumstances as his and Ellen's, had found that his theory was as false as his self-confidence was untenable. It was a wretched thought, and he must endeavour to discover how he could best remedy his fault. But that required time and consideration; at present he had neither, Hazlewood was waiting to

accompany him to Egerton Park. He must thrust aside all personal feeling for the present.

It was a most trying evening. Ellen, seated at dinner between himself and Sir Edmund, had endeavoured a thousand and a thousand times to escape, in conversation with him, from Sir Edmund's persecutions; and most willingly would he have come forward to her rescue, but his instinct of honour taught him that he had no right to do so now. And so he sat gloomy and silent, chafing over the false position in which he had allowed himself to be placed, and blaming every one save himself for being there.

Kate's inquisitive remarks put the climax to his misery; and catching at the excuse of illness, which he had already made use of to Colonel Wyndham, he had returned early to quarters.

A wretched night followed, and was succeeded by a still more wretched day. How to act he knew not. At one moment he determined to write to Terese, to tell her frankly what had happened, and leave her to decide on his future fate. But here again were difficulties. Was he entitled to break his solemn faith with her—an orphan who trusted in him alone—for the mere chance of securing his own happiness? Was she to be deprived of a home because he had allowed himself to be entangled in a danger to which his own imprudence had exposed him? Most certainly not. Were Ellen's happiness implicated, the question had been different. But this he did not believe was the case; as yet he was the only sufferer, and he deserved a punishment he had brought on himself.

Instead of writing a confession to Terese he would fight against his weakness; he would no longer allow himself to be drawn into temptation; he would daily wean himself more and more from Ellen's society. He should conquer in the end; and before his promotion came he would accept it, and all its attendant responsibilities.

This was his final decision, and as if to enable him to put his plan into execution, he was soon after informed that, as there were still some fears of a rising in the out districts a few miles from Heddlesham, it had been decided to send a small detachment to Hautonville, to aid the police if necessary; and that he was one of the officers selected for duty there.

"I am half sorry to send you, Stanhope," said Colonel Wyndham to him; "it seems a pity to break in upon all your pleasant engagements; but duty is duty, and I had rather trust you than Hauton in such a position. Besides, you know the Hautons are personally disliked in that neighbourhood."

Stanhope assured him he would gladly have volunteered for the duty, if such a thing had been allowable; he was beginning to find his present life a little too much for him.

"In short, you like pepper to your cream tarts, you ungrateful fellow," observed Captain Hazlewood. "But how are the Egertons to do without you for a whole week?"

"I will leave you as an efficient substitute, or superior rather," he answered with a slight smile. "You will, I know, tell them why I am absent."

"You have lots of time to do that for yourself. You don't start till ten this evening."

"Well, I suppose I ought to call."

"Affected puppy! when you know you are dying to have a decent excuse for going down to make arrangements for Miss Egerton's birthday gala. You cannot pretend that you forgot you volunteered to do so?"

He *had* forgotten it at the moment, but he did not say so, as, with a forced smile, he went his way, more sadly than he had ever thought to do when it lead him to Egerton Park. Nor was his regret decreased on learning from the servant who admitted him that all the family were from home except Miss Egerton.

He should, then see her alone, at the time of all others when he could have desired the presence of some one—were it even Kate—to break their *tête-à-tête*. But it was cowardly to shrink from what was inevitable, and learning that Miss Egerton was in the drawing-room, he proceeded thither unannounced. It was long since such a ceremony had been considered necessary for "only Mr. Stanhope."

Ellen was seated in her boudoir, which, as we have already said, opened from the drawing-room. It was a very hot day towards the latter end of July, and the doors were left open to admit as much fresh air as possible from the large gallery beyond; for as the drawing-room fronted the southwest, the sun was already full upon it. The large windows

of the boudoir were also open, and the light stole with a softened brilliancy through the broad leaves of a vine which had clambered up the trelliswork of its covered balcony, giving a cool green look to the little chamber, in charming contrast with the richly cultivated country which it commanded, then basking in the full effulgence of a glorious summer afternoon.

Ellen, seated on the low divan by the window, was reading so intently that the slight noise made by Reginald's entrance did not catch her ear; and she looked so very lovely, that he could not resist the temptation of watching her for a moment or two before interrupting her. Her attitude, though unstudied, was graceful, every line of her slight figure was rounded and pleasing; the volume lay upon her knee, and one arm rested on the low window-sill, its hand supporting her head, while the other held a scarlet moss rose, which showed to advantage against the indefinite tint of the self-coloured Indian silk dress she wore; the fringes of her downcast eyes rested on her cheek, whose deepened colour, and the tremulousness of her half-parted lips showed the interest she took in the book before her.

The crimson drapery of the curtain behind her, the rich colouring of the Persian carpet, the flickering shadows of the vine-leaves, the brilliant sunshine beyond, all formed a picture such as "youthful poets fancy when they love"—and, alas, Reginald Stanhope felt its full enchantment. But what, perhaps, touched him more than all was, that the rose she held was, he had often told her, his favourite flower. Many a playful discussion had passed between them on the subject, she supporting the claims of the lily against the rose, while he asserted again and again that nothing could be more beautiful than the moss rosebud, when the delicate scarlet of the half-blown flower is still veiled by the fairy fretwork of the moss. Around her were innumerable vases of costly hothouse blossoms, among which were lilics of every form and colour, but she had selected none save the half-blown moss rose. It might be an accidental coincidence, but at the moment she raised the flower to her lips and murmured, half aloud, "*C'était le parfum que toujours portait Corinne.*"

Reginald started, and for the first time the idea flashed

through his brain—"Has she, too, been deceived by the pretence of friendship?" He scarce knew whether the possibility gave him more pleasure or pain, but at all events it so unnerved him that he was forced to leave the room to regain his composure. He took several turns up and down the broad gallery on which the drawing-room opened ere he could resume command over himself. Once, indeed, he almost resolved to leave the house without seeing her again, and only fear of the cross-questioning he might have to undergo in such circumstances changed his purpose, but he stood a moment or two leaning against the door watching her before he gained courage to enter the drawing-room.

The scene was changed now. She had laid aside her book, and having drawn an embroidery frame towards her, seemed intent on copying the rosebud he had seen in her hand, for it lay on the silk on which she was working. Hitherto complete silence had reigned, broken only by the gentle rustle of the vine-leaves and the click of the embroidery needle as it pressed the silk ; but these soft sounds seemed to have suggested some half-forgotten strain to Ellen, for she attempted one or two bars of different melodies, and at length, fixing on one of those quaint fitful Welsh airs which seem so fraught with melancholy wailing, she sung the following words, which had years ago caught her childish fancy :—

" My love she gave me a golden ring
Set with a glittering gem ;
My love she gave me a flower of spring
That grows on a slender stem ;
My love she swore that she would be true
As we wander'd through the May morn dew.

" In my breast I placed the lovely flower,
On my finger put the token ;
But the blossom wither'd within an hour,
And the gem of the ring was broken ;
The dew had dried with the heat of day,
And my false love had gone away.

" But as soon as the sun in April shine,
More flowers will bloom as fair ;
And in India's gold and wealthy mine
There are gems as rich and rare ;
And the dew that's gone will come again,
To sprinkle on the summer plain.

"But when the joys of love depart,
Who can the bliss recover?
Or who can bind a broken heart—
Or soothe a forlorn lover?
Not all the gems of a golden ring,
Nor the dews of heaven, nor the flowers of spring."

The words, each as clear and distinct as the chime of a silver bell, struck painfully on Stanhope's heart. It was the first time he had heard anything connected with pain or sorrow from Ellen's lips, the first time that any expression save that of sunshiny happiness had been visible in her sweet face. But now, with the sensitiveness, the sympathetic power that fine-strung natures have of assuming to themselves the sorrows and joys of others—even though those others are fictitious—her bright eyes filled with tears, her birdlike voice breathed the very tones of heartbroken sorrow, and Stanhope trembled at this proof of how slight was his boasted knowledge of her—how little he had imagined her capable of such intense feeling.

But it was no longer time for him to muse on that or any other thought. As she finished her song she raised her eyes from her work, which, as they fell upon him, changed with the rapidity of lightning to a bright smile, and starting to her feet, she flew forward to meet him. With all her old childlike vivacity she overwhelmed him with questions as to the cause of his absence for two whole days. Whether the headache he had complained of to Kate was quite gone, and if he had, as she had requested him, arranged some very novel and very charming *fête* for her birthday?

"Indeed, Ellen, I am come on a very different mission," he said as lightly as he could. "I am ordered off to-night to Hautonville, to keep down the rioters."

"You, Reginald? To-night?" and she grew very pale. "I hope there is no real danger. I hope, I mean, that Hautonville"—she paused, she could not steady her voice to speak.

"I don't think there is the slightest cause for alarm," he said very calmly, for he did not wish to agitate either himself or her. "There has been no riot as yet, but the poor creatures on strike are starving. The Hautons are not liked in their own neighbourhood. The police are weak, so of

course the military had to be called out when Lord Hauton wrote to the magistrate that he had private information that the house was to be attacked if they did rise."

"I hope it is only an *if*. Lord Hauton is very timid, is he not?"

"Very. I do not think we shall have any more disagreeable duty than to find billets for the men in a manufacturing place where the redcoats are no favourites."

"How long shall you be gone?"

"A week, probably."

"Ah, then, you will return before my birthday."

"I hope so." He could say no less—he durst say no more.

"And you are sure there is no danger for—for yourself?" she added timidly.

"None, I assure you. There never was a crowd of unarmed men yet who could stand a charge of cavalry; it makes them run like sheep; and, thank God! there is seldom or never bloodshed. So be at ease on that score Ellen."

"I fear my birthday festivities will be commonplace enough if you are not here to direct them," she said, after a silence whose length was embarrassing to both.

"You must take Hazlewood into your councils. He, Mrs. Beaumont, Sir Francis Vere, and Miss Dashwood are a host in themselves. You will not find it possible to miss me if you have their help."

"It is not kind to say so, Reginald. You know we shall miss you every day."

"Not one thousandth part so much as I shall miss you—all," he said with much energy. "But it can't be helped. As Colonel Wyndham says, 'duty is duty,' and that reminds me I have still one or two preparations to make, so I must go," and he rose hurriedly. "Good bye, Ellen."

She took his offered hand, and repeated "Good bye;" and then, as if she found it impossible to restrain it, added fervently, "God bless and watch over you, Reginald."

She did not know how earnestly he added the Amen to her prayer—or what was the peril which he most feared. *She* was still deceived as to her own feelings, but he saw the truth—the whole truth—too clearly.

CHAPTER XIII.

IRRESOLUTION.

“ Weak and irresolute is man ;
The purpose of to-day,
Woven with pains into his plan,
To-morrow rends away.”
COWPER.

STANHOPE quitted Ellen with new and strange feelings. He was *not* the only sufferer. There was, then, but one course for him to pursue. He must write to Terese—he must break this bond which shackled him—he must be as free to tempt his fate with Ellen as others were. Such were his thoughts as he dashed along the road to Heddlesham ; and it is possible that, had he then had leisure to act as he felt inclined to do, he would have fulfilled his intentions, and that evening’s post have carried his letter to Terese. But the bustle of preparation, the night march, short as it was, the arrival at Hantonville, the necessary courtesy he was forced to pay his timorous host Lord Hauton, the discussion of the threatened peril, so entirely occupied him that he was unable to put his determination into immediate execution. When leisure came, the old idea returned, that he was not entitled for a mere idea to destroy Terese’s future. There really was nothing in Ellen’s manner which could not be satisfactorily explained without supposing she cared for him more now than she had done hitherto. A mere fancy of his that she might do so—a fancy excited, perhaps, by the perturbed state of his own feelings at the time—was not sufficient excuse for him to break his plighted word—to cause suffering to one who trusted in his honour.

What course, then, remained for him ? Only this—to conquer his own heart. It had been, it could be done. He had struggled against and overcome other temptations by the force of his own strong will, and he could, therefore, overcome this also. Was he not in the full force of his youth, his strength, his intellect ? Surely the love of a fair

face was not more difficult to subdue than the fascinations of the wine-cup, the turf, the gaming-table; yet these he had learned to despise and to condemn.

Poor Stanhope! he believed that he had only to *will* a thing to accomplish it; but, strange as it may seem, he was yet ignorant of the power of love. He had read of it, dreamed of it, laughed at it, but never till now had he felt it. There are few men of five-and-twenty who could say as much; and at that age it is a power far more to be dreaded than when its attacks are made at an earlier stage of life. The very force of will, strength, and intellect of which he boasted, were henceforward to war against, not for him, in the struggle for honour and duty.

But the struggle was begun, and the ten days of his sojourn at Hautonville were spent in laying out his future course, and in a resolution rather to seek safety in flight than to succumb. At present he knew that even if he were to apply for leave it could not be granted; but a few weeks hence there would be little difficulty in obtaining it; and then his promotion? Why, that would settle everything. He could then speak out, announce his engagement, join Terese, get married, and the struggle would be over.

Thus ended his reflections; and he hastened to join his host's family, and forget himself. But the Lady Beatrice Hauton was not the person to make him at the same time forget Ellen. There was nothing attractive about any of the Hautons; and the cold-blooded way in which the young lady spoke of the present state of the district thoroughly disgusted him.

This is no place even to touch on a subject of such moment as the rights of labour, or to discuss the difficult question of the relative positions of masters and workmen. It may be that each side has its strong points, as each we know has its weak ones; but nothing can be more painful than to hear those who themselves profit by the labours of a manufacturing population speak of them as if devoid of all right to human sympathy. Their ideas of political economy may be mistaken, their theories impracticable, their words injudicious; but no one who has ever lived among them, unbiassed by personal connection with them, can fail to look back with astonishment—nay, more, with gratitude—

on their peaceable conduct in times of trial and suffering. When one has seen bands of hungry and suffering men, women, and children thrown idle on the world, and yet committing neither theft nor worse crimes, sometimes not even begging for the food they so much require, it is difficult not to respect them for their faith in a mistaken cause, and their eager desire to do nothing to disgrace it. But when the "turnouts" happen to be, instead of workers in mills, powerfully built machinists in iron-works and so forth—men who could sack and burn a city almost before help could be procured—men who, if they chose to assume as their motto "Might makes right," could do an infinity of evil, and who yet restrain themselves within legal limits—then gratitude is joined to respect, and we admire their conduct, even while we may disapprove of their doctrines.

It was a new view for Stanhope and his friends to see this side of the question. Hitherto nothing had drawn their attention to the rights and wrongs of a manufacturing population. They had heard of the horrors of the Bristol riots; they had imbibed strong opinions on the subject of chartism and socialism, and took it for granted that all the working classes were alike; but at Hautonville their eyes were opened; they saw patient suffering, followed by no acts of violence; they saw starving crowds satisfy themselves with open air meetings, threatening-mottoed banners, and excitable language; but there it ended. There was no attack made on Lord Hauton's mansion, the houses of the millowners were left unharmed; and they could not but contrast the harsh judgments of the family who had sought their aid with the patient suffering of the operatives. Still their orders were peremptory to remain where they were, and ten days elapsed before the overtures made by the more liberal of the millowners were listened to by the more temperate of the men. Then all difficulties were gradually overcome, the workers returned to their labour, the strike was at an end, and Lord Hauton's fears of murder and pilage laid to rest; though nothing could persuade him that his own wisdom in seeking the assistance of the military had not brought things to this peaceable conclusion; and often in after years he boasted of his skill in having nipped in the bud a universal rising in these troublesome districts.

"And this is all you have to tell us of your warlike expedition?" said little Kate, addressing Reginald on his first visit to the Park; for of course he *must* call there immediately on his return. "And you have not made a hero of yourself?"

"No; I have nothing to tell, nothing to show; I am, as you said once, Kate, as useless a creature in the world as possible."

"I never said so. You were cross that night, and took up wrong every word I spoke; but now you must try to be useful, for we mean to have *tableaux vivans* on the fifteenth; and everybody, cousin Frank, the 'honest man,' and all, say that we can manage them easily if you will help us. Ellen's boudoir will make an excellent stage for them, and the passage through the conservatory will enable us to manage it all without interfering with the drawing-rooms."

"I have only once superintended *tableaux*," Stanhope answered with some hesitation. "Sir Francis and Captain Hazlewood are much more likely than I am to be of use to you."

The formality of this answer, so unlike his usual readiness to forward any plan of hers, startled Ellen; and though quite unconscious of any cause for his sudden change of manner, she answered quickly,—

"Don't tease him, Kate. It was only the fancy of a moment; it is not worth taking any trouble about. We had better give it up at once."

"Nonsense, Ellen!" said Kate, quickly. "Reginald is only lazy, or, like Louisa Mannors, he wants to be pressed to do what he knows he can do well; so tell him he must, and he will."

Stanhope reddened. "You are very severe, Kate; but if your sister really wishes me to take the charge, and will make allowances for my deficiencies, I will do what I can."

"You see, Ellen, I understand him better than you do," said Kate triumphantly.

And thus ended his resolutions! A chance, an accident forced him to resume his old position—but only for a time. The 15th was at hand, till then, indeed, he must spend every disengaged hour in Ellen's society;

arrange, suggest, guide her as he had hitherto done—but afterwards he would begin his new course of life. A few days more or less could be of little consequence; and during these few days he would be very guarded—he would avoid every unnecessary attention to her, and would never show her wishes more consideration than those of others.

It was a pity this determination had come so late. The very change in his manner, slight though it was, had already struck Mrs. Beaumont as peculiar, while on Ellen it had produced a most uncomfortable effect. Formerly his assistance on every occasion had been so readily given as almost to anticipate her wishes; now he never volunteered to do anything for her unasked, and the necessity of doing so was so strange and unaccustomed that she avoided it in every way, yet felt vexed with herself when she discovered that it was more easy to appeal to “cousin Frank” than to Reginald, in any trifling difficulty. It seemed an interference with old-established customs, an injustice to Reginald to overlook him so often, and yet what could she do—or rather, what had she done to cause the change in him? Could she have unintentionally offended him? He was not apt to take offence, and yet the strange constraint that was growing up between them must have some cause. He had been unlike himself ever since that unlucky agricultural meeting at which Sir Edmund Manners had made her so conspicuous by his attentions. What a wretched business that was! How angry Mrs. Egerton had been when she refused Sir Edmund. Mary was right—she never would forgive her for doing so. Her manner was as much altered to her now as Reginald’s. But not from the same cause—oh, no. If Reginald knew the truth he would, perhaps—Oh, Ellen, Ellen, where are your thoughts wandering? What does it signify whether he approve or disapprove your conduct in this matter? Your father does, and that ought to be enough! But, alas, she did not feel it so. She was acquiring the dangerous habit of considering every word and action through one particular medium—what *he* would think of it. It is easy to say how foolish—how idle to speculate on the impression she made on another. It is difficult not to do so so at any time, but especially when, as in Ellen’s case, *le cœur a parlé*; and worse still, when it has spoken unasked.

It happened about this time that Stanhope was leisurely riding along one of the shady lanes near Heddlesham, resolving not to approach Egerton Park that day, yet, like a moth hovering round a candle, finding himself ever in its close neighbourhood, when, turning into the high road, he caught sight of a group of equestrians coming towards him, recognized Selim while still at some distance, and was about to strike off into another lane, when Kate, who was riding in front of her sister and Harry Dashwood, waved to him to join them, and he could not disregard her signal.

"I am so glad we have met you, Reginald," she said, stretching out her hand to him with unusual graciousness. "We have had a very dull ride, and I was longing for some one to join us who could put some life into us."

The tone in which this was spoken, and the discomfited look of poor Harry, showed Stanhope that a squabble had taken place, and that the little coquette was anxious to show she had the right of the position. Diverted by her airs and graces, the caricatures of what he saw so often among older people, he indulged her for a time by allowing her to laugh and talk with him *à* Harry; but by-and-by he contrived to draw the others into the conversation, and insensibly to make the two belligerents fall once more into their natural positions. In doing this of course his own resolutions were forgotten, and before he thought about them he was riding by Ellen's side, and talking to her in the old familiar fashion.

"It seems a more serious quarrel than usual between the juniors," he observed.

"Not very serious after all," Ellen replied. "They were to take part in a tableau together, and Kate proposed to be Alice Bridgenorth to Harry's Peveril of the Peak. Harry declared I answered the description of Alice better than she did, adding that no part but that of Fenella would suit her. That was all."

"All!—it is everything—jealousy of another where she has been accustomed to be the first. How soon one does learn to be jealous! I remember my first fit perfectly. It was when Hugh Jones called you Ellen, and sent you a dish of trout. It was many weeks before I forgave him for such presumption."

"I never imagined you could be so foolish, Reginald! In

those days I used to think you perfect ;" and then, fearing she had said more than she ought to have done, she laughed nervously, and, quickening Selim's pace, joined her sister.

Reginald followed her more slowly. These few incautious words made him thoughtful. Ought he not to follow them up and frankly confess his engagement? The opportunity was too good to be lost. Whatever his promise to Mrs. Markham was, his present situation with regard to Ellen made it incumbent on him to confess the truth to her ; and he was not sorry when, in answer to their question, whether they ought not to call on Mrs. Burns that morning, Kate replied, rather pettishly.

"Not to-day. I can't be interrupted at present. Harry is telling me something so interesting. Go on, Harry—

'A breathing but devoted warrior lay'—

I do hope it was not Lara. I can't help being interested in him, however bad he was."

" 'And Lara, Kaled, Ezzelin are gone' "—

quoted Reginald.

"Do go away, Reginald ; I don't want to know the story till it comes to the end."

"That hint is too broad for us to overlook it," Stanhope observed, and allowed them to ride forward.

"Yes, indeed," Ellen answered. "Still it is such a comfort to see them on good terms again, that I cannot take it amiss. I am sure that Harry's companionship is good for Kate. He makes her think sometimes ; and my clever little sister is too apt to act first and think afterwards."

"She is very unlike what you were at her age. As unlike as Harry is to what I was."

"Yes ; and yet their circumstances have a strange likeness to ours."

"Like, and yet unlike."

"We were children merely : *they* act and talk as men and women do."

"Perhaps it is as well for both of them," he answered.

"Do you think so?" was her ingenuous reply. "I sometimes regret that Kate should have so little of the child in her. At her age I think I was happier than she is. We never quarrelled, Reginald,"

"How could any one quarrel with you, Ellen!" burst from his lips before he knew what he was saying, and then, to cover his confusion, he added, "Besides, as we never thought of quoting Byron during our rides at Penmorfa, of course we could not be expected to comprehend the finer-strung feelings which induce people to quarrel and make friends again, merely to enjoy the intense luxury of a reconciliation."

"I cannot imagine it any pleasure to quarrel with one's friends, even for such a purpose," Ellen answered, gravely. "I think nothing could ever make up to me for having learned that there could be dissension between myself and those I cared for. But, as you say, I was not like Kate, brought up on Byron."

"If you had been, you might have quoted—though, by the way, it is Southey, not Byron, who wrote the lines—

'For to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain'—

Kate, however, has as yet only attained to the point of caring for the story of a poem. Would *I* could go back to that happy time—to those childish feelings. 'Tis a pity one grows too old to care for Byron."

"Too old, Reginald? To me it seems that the older we grow, and the more knowledge we have of the world, the more we should appreciate Byron. His language is so rich, his imagery so harmonious, and his descriptions read like true portraits."

"It is the very truth of some of his portraits which make them distasteful after early youth. Then the floating measure of the verse, the exquisite music of the rhythm, charm our fancy, while the morbid sentiments, the dark pictures he draws of human nature, fascinate us from the contrast they present to our own bounding hopes—our bright anticipations of what life will bring to us. In after-years that charm passes away. We compare our high-wrought expectations with reality, our lofty resolves with our utter failures. We remember what we are, and what we hoped to be; and when we attempt to drink once more of the fountain which was wont to delight us, we find the chalice poisoned."

Ellen shuddered as he rapidly uttered these strange words.

Were they mere nonsense, or had they any hidden meaning? Was the Reginald she had looked up to from childhood really so different from what he appeared to be? Impossible! and she said, with a faint effort at gaiety,—

“Well done, Reginald! you have answered me to some purpose. But I hope you do not wish me to believe, from this rhapsody, that *you* find the chalice of life poisoned?”

He looked at her keenly; saw that in spite of her assumed ease of manner, she was struck by what he had said, and replied,—

“There are few men in this world, Ellen, who are what they seem, and I am not one of them.”

“Few of us are what we seem,” she replied, much relieved by this explanation; “and if that is all that your ‘poisoned chalice’ means, I am satisfied.”

“Not quite all. You have known me only as I have been when with you—first as a boy, latterly as——” he stopped, uncertain how to end the sentence.

“Latterly as the kind guide who has been a comfort and help to me in my first struggle with the world,” she hastily added. “Every letter I have from Penmorfa congratulates me on having you here along with my other friends.”

“It was not in that light, however, that I have always appeared,” Stanhope said, a little bitterly. “Instead of being the guide of others, I have sometimes been their dupe, and have been led by them into difficulties and temptations, from which I have not always escaped scathless.”

“I have heard you were very extravagant once,” she said, nervously.

“And what more have you heard of me?” he asked abruptly.

“Not much. Captain Hazelwood told Judith that before you joined the 20th you were called ‘an extravagant, idle dog,’—you see I use the very words,—but that he can scarcely believe it, you have been so different ever since he knew you.”

“They might say worse things than that of me, Ellen, and be justified in doing so. I *was* an extravagant, idle dog. I forgot all the fond warnings of my dear mother; and as soon as I was my own master, I gave up the life of labour and distinction she had chalked out for me. I insisted on entering

the army. I became a fool among fools—a leader in everything that was most idle, most extravagant; and where I might have ended, short of actual vice as well as ruin, I cannot tell; had I not been saved from both by a startling incident in my life. It is of it I wish to tell you. May I do so?”

“Certainly. You know that I am interested in everything connected with you.”

“But this is a secret, Ellen,—a thing I promised to tell no one till a certain time came; still I think I may make you an exception.”

“Oh no, Reginald! not if you have promised. A promise is always sacred.”

“Even when extorted against our will—even when good might be done by breaking it?”

“These are questions of casuistry, are they not?” she said. “To me it seems better to hold to the sacred words, ‘And though he promise to his loss, still makes that promise good.’ I would rather not hear your secret Reginald.”

“A time may come when you may regret this decision, and may think it was unfriendly, uncandid, in me to yield to your wishes.”

“I do not think it can be so. If it be, remind me that you were not to blame.”

Reginald still hesitated. It seemed to him as if now or never he must relieve his mind; but ere he could decide on the right course to pursue, the others joined them, and the opportunity was lost.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR EDMUND MANNERS.

“Men are uneasy in themselves, and then shift the blame off themselves upon the persons they converse with, and the times and places they live in.”—JEREMIAH SEED.

“I MUST leave you now,” Reginald said, as they reached the gate of the avenue; “but I shall be early at the Park to-morrow. We shall require all our time to arrange the tableaux properly.”

“Why not come home and dine with us?” asked Kate,

who was always hospitably inclined. "You know we are sure to have a dull party before the assembly. As usual, the Mannerses dress at our house. Don't they Ellen?"

"I think so. I am not sure," said Ellen hesitatingly, for she knew that Mrs. Egerton had been expecting an excuse the whole morning, and though it had not arrived before they left home, she never doubted that it would come. It was impossible, she thought, that Sir Edmund, at all events, could come, after what had passed.

"I forgot it was an assembly night," Stanhope said, "but as I don't mean to go, I had better hold to my first intention. Good-bye till to-morrow." But as he said the words Mr. Egerton came up.

"Ah, Stanhope, I was on my way to you. We want you to dine with us. One of our party has failed us, and I know you will be good-natured enough to come in his stead. No refusal I pray. I have been up at barracks and ordered down your traps; because, you see—ride on girls!—because you see I have set my heart on your making a little sketch of Ellen for me. I cannot get Kate to give me up hers, and—in short, you will indulge me, will you not?"

Again Stanhope felt it impossible to refuse a request so urged, and satisfying his conscience with the thought that he had intended to do right, he agreed.

Besides, it was his greatest pleasure to take likenesses. To great exactness of eye he added a peculiar rapidity of execution which rendered it easy for him to make a characteristic portrait. Those who have not this last gift, but are forced to copy line by line what they see before them, obliging their victims to remain in the same posture for hours together, seldom succeed in making an unconstrained and easy portrait. But Reginald's accurate memory was most useful to him, enabling him frequently to dispense with regular "sittings" altogether. When he had once seen a face, he seldom forgot it, and he was generally able to present a very fair resemblance of it if he had the opportunity of marking the balance of the features and play of the countenance in conversation. With those he knew thoroughly, however, he found it more difficult to succeed, and in the present instance several reasons combined to make it far from easy to comply with Mr. Egerton's wish.

Still he did comply, and Kate was greatly taken up with the whole affair.

"Ellen must sit on the divan in her boudoir," she declared, "must have some dark drapery behind her, and must have flowers in her hand, or a book, or something to make her look like herself."

Stanhope made no answer, but contrived to place her in an attitude somewhat similar to that in which he had found her a fortnight before, the sole difference being that now it was an assumed, not a natural position, and that Kate insisted on his dragging a huge myrtle from the conservatory to make what she chose to consider a good foreground.

Ellen was passive in their hands, but was not sorry when, after the lapse of half an hour, Reginald told her he would release her from her bondage, and she might leave the room if she pleased. She did so at once, rather to Kate's amazement, but a few moments afterwards a summons from her maid to dress for dinner cleared up the mystery to her satisfaction.

"Ellen was wiser than I," she said. "She remembered it was late when we came back from our ride. Do not you get so immersed in your work, Reginald, as to forget dinner altogether."

"Oh no, I shall soon have done. Just hand me the colour-box, will you, Kate. Thank you ;" and he was left alone. A few minutes passed, when Mrs. Egerton looked into the room.

"Please, Mr. Stanhope, do go with us to the assembly ; we really wish you would. Oh, how prettily that is coming out ! But will you go with us ?"

"Most certainly, if you wish it."

"I do, I assure you ; but it is almost five. I must go. I know you don't mind being left alone. You are quite at home here now."

Why did she say that ? Why did everything combine to make him feel the bitterness of his present position ? His thoughts were as busy as his pencil ; but vague, very vague ; the conversation he had with Ellen, the doubt how he should frame his future conduct, made him so unconscious of the flight of time that he was only roused from his reverie by the announcement of the expected dinner guests.

Hearing Sir Edmund's voice in the hall, and anxious that he should not find him at work on Ellen's portrait, he sprang up, closed the Venetian blinds, and made his escape through the conservatory to his own room, where he lost no time in dressing; but before he returned to the drawing-room, dinner was announced, the company were filing off towards the dining-room, and Kate, gliding towards him, whispered, "Do you know he has come after all? Is it not very odd of him? and so provoking, too; for mamma said, if he did not come, I was to go to dinner, and you might take me. I am quite vexed. And now you must go by yourself. But do try not to let him sit next Ellen. And come up immediately and finish the picture. I want to get it out of the way before he sees it. He went prowling into the boudoir as usual, and I suspect got a peep, but he must have no more."

All this was rather enigmatical to Stanhope; but he was soon enlightened as to her meaning. By one of those accidents which the ablest hostess cannot always avert, the company would not divide itself into the proper proportion of ladies and gentlemen, and Sir Edmund Manners was separated from his partner, and obliged to take the opposite side of the table. This change, by a strange fatality, brought him next Ellen, and his face, at finding where he was, assumed an expression so rueful and at the same time so ludicrously determined to seem quite at his ease, that it required no *Oedipus* to read Kate's riddle.

"Sir Edmund, you are seated next your sister," said Mrs. Egerton, a little nervously. "Will you allow Mr. Stanhope to exchange places with you?"

For a moment the poor man hesitated, as if fearing to show how much he wished to avail himself of her suggestion. But he had actually risen to do so, when Miss Manners, with her usual attention to her own personal comfort, exclaimed—

"If any change is to be made, *I* had better take Mr. Stanhope's place, for I particularly dislike to sit opposite the light."

Sir Edmund looked seriously annoyed, but was subsiding again into his place, when Mr. Egerton very quietly observed,—

"Ay, that will do excellently well. Miss Manners takes Stanhope's place; Stanhope takes Sir Edmund's; and Sir

Edmund helps the soup, a thing that no man can do so well as he does. Charming! arranged! Thank you, Miss Manners, for getting the right man into the right place."

The good-natured speech put Sir Edmund at ease, but grated against Stanhope. "Was *he* in the right place? Well! it was not his doing. He seemed the sport of fate. Every thing was drawing him deeper and deeper into the whirlpool which was his happiness, yet might be his destruction."

The dinner went off heavily. Reginald exerted himself as much as possible to talk to Sir Edmund; wisely believing that, in the circumstances, the less he conversed with Ellen the better; and for a time his overtures were well received. But some chance allusion to the birthday party the next day seemed to give offence,—Stanhope did not know how,—and Sir Edmund's manner changed completely. He scarcely answered when spoken to, and, in short, behaved so very strangely, that Stanhope must have been deeply offended, had he not observed how often his wineglass was filled and emptied; and remembering Mr. Egerton's remark, that if his vanity were once wounded, his good-nature would disappear at once, guessed correctly enough that he had intended that the next day's festivities should have glorified himself as well as Ellen; wherefore any allusion to them was gall and bitterness.

Once or twice Sir Edmund's manner to Reginald was so very offensive, that Ellen turned pale, fearing that he might be irritated beyond even his endurance; but he was on his guard, and contrived so dexterously to turn the covert attack into a jest, or, at worst, to change the subject, that all danger was averted.

Mr. Egerton's approving smile showed that he remarked and approved Reginald's skilful fencing; while Ellen's rising colour proved her appreciation of his behaviour; but others only thought Sir Edmund and Mr. Stanhope particularly talkative, and wished themselves next them, for every one else was so dull. Reginald, however, was in no very agreeable position, and but for Ellen's presence, might have resented Sir Edmund's impertinence, for he felt his patience gradually oozing away, while his feelings were in far too excited a state to allow him the full command of his temper.

But at last the ladies left the room, and turning to Mr. Egerton soon after, he asked permission to follow them, and complete his drawing before the daylight was quite gone.

"By all means, my dear fellow ; the very thing I wished to propose. I should like to have the picture to-night, for I know the house will be turned upside down to-morrow."

Kate was waiting for him in the hall, to tell him that as she had secured the closing of the Venetian blinds, he might safely go round by the conservatory, and avoid entering the drawing-room altogether.

"A thousand thanks, dear Kate. You do not know what a service you have done me."

"Nonsense, Reginald. I want the picture finished. Papa has promised I shall help him to mount it to-night, when you go to the ball."

"Do you think you could find time to mount one or two of my other sketches?" he said, after a moment's hesitation. "I wanted to give your sister some remembrance on her birthday, and made one or two drawings for her when I was at Hantonville. I shall desire Evans to bring them to you, if you will undertake to tidy them for me."

"Oh, I shall do that willingly, if you lose no time in finishing Ellen."

"Could she come to the boudoir for a moment? I should like one other five minutes."

"She is there already."

"I am so glad you are come so soon," Ellen said, the moment he entered, "I was quite nervous and uncomfortable about you. Sir Edmund was so provoking."

"There are some occasions," he said, hastily, "on which one cannot be made angry. I really felt more sorry than annoyed, I assure you. Indeed, you were more to be pitied than I."

Ellen glanced up at him inquiringly, and the half-smile that answered her mute question made her colour.

"Promise me," she said, "that you will keep as clear of him as you can. I wish he had not come to-night—I wish he were not coming to-morrow ; but it can't be helped."

"Do not make yourself uneasy, the worst is passed. All will go on swimmingly now ; and disagreeable as this is, believe me, dear Ellen, it will save you much future annoyance." His

earnest desire to reassure her made him forget himself, and speak so much more like his old self than he had done lately, that Ellen felt a load removed from her heart. Even the "dear Ellen" was uttered so as rather to give her confidence than to agitate her, and thus the sketch was resumed under more favourable auspices than at first seemed probable, and was completed with success.

Kate ran in to see if it were finished, and finding it was, bade Reginald unclose the blinds, it was so gloomy in the drawing-room when the boudoir was shut off; and leaving him to fulfil her orders, she snatched up the drawing and ran off to show it to her father, who, with the other gentlemen, had that instant entered the drawing-room.

"Ah! a rehearsal for to-morrow," said Sir Edmund, raising his eye-glass to look into the boudoir, as the Venetians were slowly folded back; "and a most lovely *tableau* it is!

" 'I saw two beings in the hue of youth,
And one was young, and both were beautiful'—

"no, no, that's wrong. How does it go, Stanhope—you understand that sort of thing?" and he lounged towards the table where Ellen and Reginald still stood.

"Mrs. Egerton spoke of going early to the assembly, did she not?" Reginald said, without seeming to hear him.

"Oh, thank you for reminding me," she exclaimed, "I have still to dress," and she flitted out of the room, making him a sign to follow. He obeyed readily, and before poor Sir Edmund could quite understand what was going on, he found himself alone, and with the exclamation of "Half civil only, by Jove!" he flung himself down on the divan and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

HOPES AND FEARS.

"I gave my heart unconsciously ; it fill'd
With love, as flowers are fill'd with early dew
And with the light of morning.
If he be false, he who appear'd so true,
Can there be any further truth in life
When falsehood wears such seeming.

L. E. L.

THOSE who are dilatory themselves are frequently most severe on the unpunctuality of others—and Mrs. Egerton not being in particularly good humour with her step-daughter at present, eagerly seized on the present opportunity to indulge a fit of indignation against her.

"What can detain Ellen ? It is very provoking of her to be late when I wished so particularly to be in time to-night. As one of the patronesses of the evening, I ought to be exact. The portrait ? Nonsense, that need not have prevented her from dressing before dinner ; it would have been much more effective in a *décolleté* dress. But, to be sure, Mr. Egerton has fancies, and so has Ellen, dear girl, as well, and I cannot possibly interfere with them. However, here she is, so we had better go at once."

It was well for Ellen that Mrs. Beaumont had, meanwhile, arranged that she should accompany her, and thus escape the martyrdom Mrs. Egerton had prepared for her in going with her and the two Mannerses. Sir Francis Vere and Stanhope went together, and thus, the discordant elements being kept asunder, all reached the ball-room in a more composed state than might have been expected.

Everybody said it was a charming assembly. The dragoon band was made to play in the anteroom, so as to cause a diversion of part of the company to the smaller assembly room, and thus leave more space in the larger. And Colonel Wyndham managed matters so well, that while the "Heddleshamites" felt pleased by the colonel's courtesy in bringing his band, his own immediate friends were enabled

to escape from the crowd of nobodies in the larger room, and form their own little circle in the small one. Dancing was kept up with great animation. Ellen never sat a dance, and everybody said that they had never seen her look so brilliant. But, in reality, she was far from enjoying the ball. Sir Edmund Manners had insisted on dancing the first quadrille with her, and Miss Manners was so pointedly rude as to make her very uncomfortable, especially as she saw how indignant Reginald was at her behaviour, and what difficulty he had in not showing his anger. On the whole, however, he behaved beautifully, though one incident occurred, in which Louisa's malice was so conspicuous, that it was difficult not to resent it openly. On pulling off her glove in the tea room, Ellen discovered that she had dropped a heart-shaped diamond, the centre stone of an old-fashioned ring of her mother's, which she valued so much from having been the first jewel she ever possessed, that she called it her "talisman," and wore it constantly. Having sought it elsewhere in vain, she, at Sir Francis Vere's suggestion, returned to the ball-room to seek it, remembering that she had there drawn off her glove to fasten her earring, which had come unclasped. They met Colonel Wyndham in the doorway with Miss Manners, and seeing her wandering eye, he asked whether she had lost anything?

"Yes," said Ellen, "the centre stone of my ring."

Miss Manners looked her full in the face, and said very coolly, "Is that all? I thought you must have lost your heart at least—you look so disconsolate."

Ellen reddened, but answered with spirit, "It is a heart I have lost,—but a diamond one."

"Oh, I wonder who has found it! Mr. Stanhope, perhaps; I see him coming in this direction. Mr. Stanhope, Miss Egerton has lost her heart, have you found it?"

"I have," said Mrs. Beaumont, who was leaning on Reginald's arm; "you dropped it, Ellen, when you stopped to fasten your earring. I would not have you lose this stone for a great deal; I remember seeing your dear mother wear it, so that it is doubly valuable to all who knew her and you."

"May I look at the stone, Miss Egerton?" asked Colonel Wyndham, dropping Louisa's arm in a manner that showed

that her malicious speech had not raised her in his esteem. "I have seldom seen a finer diamond of its size ; the rays it throws out are most beautiful."

"Yes," said Mrs. Beaumont, "it is a pretty fancy to liken genius to a diamond. The rays of each extend so far beyond their own immediate sphere."

"How many superstitions are connected with diamonds !" Ellen observed, desirous to take a part with apparent indifference in a conversation which had begun so uncomfortably, and, turning to Sir Francis, she asked him whether he had ever heard the superstition that a diamond is a test of the giver's good faith, and loses its brilliancy when he intends treachery.

"These 'freits,' as the Scotch call them, are not much in my way," said Sir Francis, good-naturedly ; "but I don't wonder that they should be connected with such pretty things as precious stones. Will you trust me to keep yours for you till you reach home ? Colonel Wyndham seems doubtful what to do with it."

"I should be so much obliged to you ; for I am engaged for this country-dance, and might lose it again."

She took Reginald's offered arm, and went to join the dancers. Sir Francis looked after her with real interest, and, as he stood by his sister, whispered—

"Tell me, Mary, have Louisa Manners's impertinences any foundation ?"

"I wish I could answer you, Frank. I am fairly puzzled : sometimes I say yes, sometimes no. Perhaps her ill-natured speech may bring things to the point."

Sir Francis shook his head. "I doubt that it is on one side only. No man could have that strange, troubled look in his eyes when with her, if all were running smooth. Yet I like Stanhope. There is a great deal of good in him. His behaviour at dinner to-day was admirable."

"How well she looks to-night !"

"Well—but anxious ; surrounded though she is by friends, luxuries, and all that sort of thing, she is sadly alone in the world. I hope, Mary, you will continue to care for her."

"I do indeed care for her, Frank ; but how can you call her alone, when she has a friend like Judith Dashwood and a father like Mr. Egerton ?"

A rather sad smile passed over his face as he said, "They say that lookers-on generally see most of the game; and it seems to me that Judith has her own affairs to look after at present, which occupy both herself and her mother pretty completely and pretty pleasantly. As to Mr. Egerton, I like him as a friend, I respect him as a man, I am grateful to him for all he has done for me; but we both know him, Mary, we both feel that he has faults which make him a sorry counsellor for a girl like Ellen."

"Too true, Frank!" and she sighed; "the poor child unconsciously let me discover that she has already found that out. She has no one to open her young heart to. Would to Heaven I had any right to seek her confidence!"

"You have all the right that one loving woman has to show sympathy with another."

"True; but——" and she hesitated.

"Don't think of me, Mary; I shall never seek to encroach on your confidence."

"Well, Frank, I shall try. I think she needs help more than she is herself aware of."

Reginald and Ellen had meanwhile joined the dancers; but the heat and the crowd soon induced them to leave the long dance unfinished, and seat themselves on the sofa at the lower end of the room.

"Have you enjoyed this evening?" he asked suddenly, after a long silence.

She gave a slight start, and hesitated a little before she answered in the affirmative.

"The Mannerses' stupidity has given you pain?" he continued.

"It is silly to feel it; but it did at first. I don't think I shall care for it after to-night. You are right, that it is better to go through with it at once."

"I can pardon him—a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," he replied, with a strange half-bitter expression about his face, which Ellen had never observed before, and which, joined to this enigmatical quotation, confused her; "but I cannot forgive her; she is a disagreeable, unladylike girl."

"She is no favourite of mine; but I think you are too hard on her."

"Where did you pick up that superstition about the diamond losing its brilliancy when the giver proves false?" he asked abruptly.

"In 'Corinne.' It caught my fancy; it goes something in this way: '*Une ancienne croyance n'apprend-elle pas que le diamant est plus fidèle que l'homme, et qu'il se ternit quand celui qui l'a donné nous trahit?*'"

"It is a strange idea, and yet it felt familiar to me. I now understand how. Was it 'Corinne' you were reading the day I went to Hautonville?" he added, after a short silence.

"Yes, I was reading it that day, and it interested me deeply. Even the absurdity of the story did not prevent me from being carried away by it. The descriptions are so beautiful, and the character of Corinne herself so fine. But what made you suppose I was reading it on that particular day?"

"To tell the truth, I saw you in the boudoir before I joined you, and I overheard one sentence you uttered: '*C'était le parfum que toujours portait Corinne.*' I used once to be as well versed as you are in that book; and somehow the perfume of otto of roses always recalls to me my mother's little sanctum at my own old lost home, and my childish delight in 'Corinne.' I *hoped* you were reading my old favourite that day."

A mingling of saddened recollections with present agitation in Stanhope's thoughts, as he hastily uttered these words, gave a strangely broken tone to his voice, which Ellen felt to be very infectious, as she answered,—

"Novel-reading is a new pleasure to me. I think I *believe* in books more than most girls of my age. After finishing that one in particular, I felt really unhappy for a time; I hated Lord Nelvil for yielding to his father's prejudices when they led to the sacrifice of such a creature as Corinne."

"Yes; he knew she loved him, otherwise he was bound in honour——"

"Reginald, pray don't attempt to defend him. I detest the man."

A sudden contraction, as if of pain, furrowed Stanhope's brow; and he grew so deadly pale that Ellen could not help asking if he were ill,

"The draught from the door chills one," he said with a shiver.

"Then let us move away," she said, rising hastily.

"No, no ; pray sit down again. I want to go on with what we were saying. You think Lord Nelvil detestable, yet I assure you he is no uncommon character. I have known a story somewhat similar, and the hero of it——"

"Ellen, are you ready to go ?" said Mrs. Egerton, coming up to them ; "it is quite late, and to-morrow will be a fatiguing day. Sir Francis is gone to call the carriage. Shall we move, Mr. Stanhope ?"

"I must tell you my story some other time." Reginald whispered, as he drew Ellen's arm within his.

They were all very silent on their way home ; and when Ellen found herself in her own quiet room, she felt unable to sleep ; the incidents of the evening had been such as to puzzle her, and render her more inclined to lie awake and think, than lose herself, as she used to do a few months before, in pleasant waking dreams, that faded gradually into more pleasant sleeping ones.

Youth is not naturally the season for reflection ; it is proverbially the time for hope, not memory ; the present and future are all in all ; the past little or nothing, unless when verging so closely on the present as to be almost one with it. But the peculiarity of Ellen Egerton's position in her father's house had already forced her to look back more than formerly, to compare her present life with that which had gone before, and to try to deduce from her early lessons some code of conduct for the present. As Sir Francis Vere had said, she was in truth very much alone, although surrounded by friends ; and when the first gloss of novelty had passed from the new state of existence into which she had been so suddenly plunged, she begun to feel that it was so, to find vague fears mingling with her hopes, and to look back with that half-longing, doubtful gaze which we cast back to the solid land when about to sail over unknown seas, however barren the one may be, however brilliant the other. Sir Edmund Manners's proposal had startled her into a new and less childlike perception of things. On first coming to Egerton Park she was happy ; but as a child is enjoying the present without anxiety for the future. She was happy still ; but

it was a very different happiness from the first. The fearlessness of complete ignorance had passed away; she had already penetrated in some degree beneath the surface of the society life in which she moved; she had seen, though she had scarcely experienced as yet, the heartburnings and disappointments of those who live only for the world; and the conviction was gradually stealing over her that where others suffered she could not pass altogether unscathed. Yet where could she turn for advice or assistance in these first threatenings of future anxieties? Once upon a time she could have opened her whole heart to Reginald; she could not do so now. An unaccountable reserve had lately sprung up between them, partly perhaps because of this unlucky admiration of Sir Edmund's, which of course she could not openly talk to him about, partly—partly from other causes—his indifference—his—well, it did not signify what was the cause, the result was the same. She could *not* talk to him confidentially any more.

Yet how pleasant it had been to-night; it was so much more like old times. He had once or twice called her Ellen again, instead of that detestable “you” which he had lately substituted for her Christian name—a name she so liked to hear him utter. But he looked ill. Something had evidently happened to vex him: what could it be? That secret which she had refused to hear, perhaps, might have explained it; yet she was right to prevent him from telling even her; it could be nothing very much against him, she was sure. He had once had heavy debts. It was probably to them that he alluded. But where was she wandering? It was of herself she ought to think on the eve of her birthday, not of him. This day last year she was a mere ignorant child; to-morrow she should be eighteen, and, in comparison with last year, she was a woman. Poor Ellen! you a woman with all these childish fancies in your head! Ah! poor dreamer, a few months more and you will know indeed what it is that makes a woman's life!

The night was over, and her thoughts were still fluttering between heaven and earth, childhood and womanhood. The bright morning sun had risen, it was the ideal of a lovely August day, when summer is gently glowing, rather than

fading, into autumn. The foliage was still rich and massive, but a few changing tints showed that it was verging insensibly towards the varied colouring of a later season; the flowers had acquired the brilliant hues of autumn, the fields wore a rich golden brown, the sky a deep dazzling blue, the sun had that fervid glow that in our climate seems to belong only to the latter days of summer, and yet there was at this early hour a faint, soft, refreshing, breeze, that made everything look delicious. It was like Ellen's own heart, the season of mere hope only was past, but it was now that of present peace, with a slight, very slight, indication of the change that must come over all that is of earth, be it the seasons as they pass, flowers as they fade, or the human heart as it grows in knowledge and in suffering.

But this last idea had not yet presented itself to her mind. She only thought how lovely was the dawn of her birthday, augured from it a charming day, and extending the presage a little further, a bright year to come; and then she laid her down and fell into a calm, sweet sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

TABLEAUX VIVANS.

"Fate steals along with silent tread,
Found oftenest in what least we dread;
Frowns in the storm with angry brow,
But in the sunshine strikes the blow."

COWPER.

"MANY happy returns of your birthday, my darling Ellen!" was little Kate's eager greeting to her sister on that memorable 15th of August, and, flinging her arms round her neck, she added, "I was resolved to be the first to wish you a happy year, so I rushed in, in spite of Martha, who declared you were not ready, but I knew you would let little Kitten come, though nobody else did. And, see, I have brought you a tiny gold chain for your watch. I don't like that huge cable you wear with it; and this—won't you

like this, Ellen? a very, very tiny little gold kitten, to hang to your bunch of seals, and remind you always of your little sister. Do they please you, my pet? Oh, that is a hearty, good kiss, it shows you are pleased. And now I wonder what you will give me for this?" opening a portfolio, nearly as big as herself, which she had dragged into the room with her, and flung down on the table. "Papa and I think them charming. Reginald left them with us last night to 'tidy' for you, and I think we have done them very nicely. Was it not good of him to draw them for you? He did them at Hantonville, to be ready for your birthday."

"They are very pretty," Ellen said, very quietly.

"Pretty! they are beautiful. Only look, here are the Ridings, with you on the ground, and cousin Frank picking you up. How like you both are; though it is a poetical license of Master Reginald's to make Sir Francis pick you up, for he did it himself, and brought you to life again, when we all thought you were 'kilt entirely.'"

"Ah! that is papa!"

"Yes, even he himself allows that is good. And is not the boudoir beautiful? I think it a prettier likeness of you than the one he did last night, if he had not made you looking so wretchedly sad; it is a thing my dear Ellen never does look, and that I shall tell him. But what is this place, Ellen? I think papa recognized it, for he said it was very, very like, but he did not seem quite to want to say more, so I did not ask him where it was, I thought I would rather ask you."

Tears were in Ellen's eyes as she answered, "It was my mother's favourite walk at Penmorfa, Kate. How well he remembers the place! See, that is the beautiful beech-tree I have often told you was finer than any we have here; and that is the Conway, sweeping round that rock. How often have we played there together!"

"Then that is Reginald, is it? I fancied it had a kind of look of him, but I never should have supposed that was you, Ellen."

"Yet it is very like what I was at your age, Kitten. One changes much in seven years."

"I wonder what I shall be like in seven years," said the young lady, taking a sly peep into the mirror, and looking

rather ruefully at a face whose piquante expression and large black eyes were its only beauties; "a fright, I fear! But there is the breakfast-bell, let us go, Ellen.

That was indeed a bustling morning. As Mr. Egerton had prophesied, the house was turned upside down; for Mrs. Egerton had insisted that "everybody" should be invited to Ellen's birthday party, and that the *tableaux vivans* should be followed by a ball; and as Colonel Wyndham had promised to send the band, she expected to make the whole thing very splendid; and already the rooms were dismantled, the very library invaded by intrusive tables and chairs, and the quiet little boudoir ringing with the sounds of hammers, busy in transforming it into a stage, under the directions of Mr. Egerton and Reginald, who had been at work there for at least a couple of hours before breakfast.

It was diverting to see the energy with which Mr. Egerton had thrown himself into the spirit of these *tableaux*. Of late he had allowed things to take their course, seldom giving more than a half-contemptuous sanction to the amusements passing around him, but in the present instance he had been the principal instigator of the arrangements. Nominally he had made Stanhope director of everything, but without his suggestion Reginald would never have thought of the possibility of transforming Mr. Egerton's own little sanctum into the green-room, although it—as well as the boudoir—had a door opening into the conservatory; but for him he had never guessed where the cuirasses of the time of the civil wars, the velvet coats of Queen Anne's day, or the other thousand aids to dress and decoration were to be found; nor had he dared to pull old Sir Ralph Egerton out of his huge frame to place it in the doorway of the boudoir, making the little recessed room look like one large picture.

Even little Kate, whose bump of inquisitiveness had always been highly developed, was taken by surprise at the amazing quantity of odds and ends her father had drawn from unsuspected repositories within the last week. "If I had known all that these quaint old cabinets contained," she said, "you would never have been able to keep me out of your room, papa."

"So I knew, my love," he said, quietly; "but now that you see them you may as well take a good look at them,

for I intend they shall go back whence they came as soon as this foolery is over."

"But they would do so nicely for a fancy ball, papa!"

"Child, don't tease me! I have told you my wishes, and you know I can keep my word when I say I will." Kate changed colour and walked out of the room. Mr. Egerton smiled. "Poor little body, I did not intend to hurt her, but it saves trouble to be sharp with her sometimes. Reginald, I trust these things to you; do what you like with them, but give me no further trouble about them. I'll go to the farm, and get out of this turmoil. By the bye, if you want any out-of-the-way things—rouge, or patches, or snuff-boxes, or fans—there are some in here, I think. Humph! it is well I looked them out myself. What a collection! I say, Stanhope, have you ever tried oil painting? I did once, and stowed all the materials in here. See what a painter's shop—canvass, oils, varnish, brushes, palettes. You'd do me an immense favour if you would carry them off to barracks with you—I shall never touch them again. When the room is put to rights, Ellen, see that these things are sent to Mr. Stanhope's quarters; and there, child, keep those gewgaws for yourself," and he thrust into her hand an antique silver-bound casket, containing a curious collection of old-fashioned ornaments. "Some of them are valuable, I believe, but, certainly, they are far from pretty. Good bye for the present, children, I shall be home for dinner. Ah! there are the Veres, they will help you far better than I can."

The afternoon flew rapidly away. The pictures already selected were rehearsed, the dresses prepared; every arrangement made, even to the placing of the lights so as to allow of their being changed in position to suit the scene of the moment—and the stretching of thin gauze across the doorway to soften the otherwise too great distinctness of the outline, and make the illusion greater.

But when all else was settled, a new idea occurred to Mrs. Beaumont, and, turning to her brother, she asked him if he remembered a picture which they had both liked, of Cromwell's royalist daughter, Lady Fauconberg, showing her father Charles I.'s picture? "I think, with these arms and accoutrements, we could manage it easily. Mr.

Stanhope would do for the portrait exactly ; there could not be a better Lady Fauconberg than Ellen, the half-puritanic half-royalist dress would become her extremely, and, as for Cromwell, why I think, Frank, you yourself would look the part admirably."

"I take part in a *tableau*, Mary?"

"Why not? Mr. Egerton has promised to make a St. Jerome of himself—I am to be Lady Macbeth—so why should not my grave brother be Cromwell?"

Sir Francis laughed, said it was quite out of his way, but he would do anything they liked. So the picture was decided upon, but was to be a surprise even to Mr. Egerton. One difficulty, however, occurred to the execution of this idea, apparently trivial, but in reality almost insurmountable. How was a picture to be introduced within a picture? It would have been simple enough to hang a real portrait on the wall; but to have it so arranged as to enable Stanhope properly to represent one was the puzzle.

"Could he not stand in the window behind the curtains," asked little Kate, "and peep out between them?"

"I fear that would look like a man hidden there, rather than a portrait, Kitten."

"Well, I don't know what else to propose, unless you get a gilt-paper frame—for I am sure if you get a great, heavy wooden one, propped up on two chairs, or anything of that kind, it would topple down on some of you, when Ellen pulled back the curtain to show it."

"The curtain is pulled back already," Sir Francis said, with a smile; "it is a *tableau*, remember, not a charade."

"Well, then, you must have a gilt paper frame, or else Reginald could paint one," said the child, pertinaciously. "I could not consent to let you run the risk of a wooden one falling and hurting you."

"What do you say," asked Stanhope, "to my placing myself so as to be reflected in that mirror? I think if we could get the lights properly placed, that would have a wonderful effect."

"Ay, so it would—let us try;" and the success was so complete, that they were all charmed with it. The arrangement of the lights was, certainly, a little complicated, but even that difficulty was overcome, and all agreed the picture

was a decided hit, and would prove the *chef-d'œuvre* of the evening.

"Remember, Kate, you are not to tell papa, or Harry, or anybody of this," Mrs. Beaumont said, "it is to be our own little mystery—a delight and surprise to everybody."

Kate promised, though she would like to except Harry and "the honest man."

"You may except them," said Stanhope, good-naturedly, "for we shall want the honest man to act lightsman and candle-snuffer; and I suspect we shall want Harry too, to help our toilet."

"Well, then, I am quite content. I want to be a spectator, but Harry, I know, wants to help."

The evening came, the company assembled, and the long-talked-of *tableaux* began. The remarks that were made may easily be imagined, when, instead of a small circle of connoisseurs or intimate friends, "everybody" was present, and people seemed more intent on discovering who were the performers engaged than admiring the real skill with which it was effected.

"Ah, I know that face; no—I thought it was Captain Hazlewood's, but it is not. Who can it be? A white beard does so disfigure people. It is set down as 'an old man, by Rembrandt.' An old man—who can he be?" exclaimed Miss Edith Attwood, puzzling over the list she held, instead of looking at the short-lived picture. "Dear me, is it done already? It was scarce worth while to dress up for such a moment."

"Mr. Egerton, did you say? He would not join in such follies. I do not think they are half so nice as acted charades. But what is the next?—'Lara and Kaled'—I do not remember ever to have heard of either."

"Hush, child!" whispered her mother; "look and don't talk."

This, however, was not Miss Edith's *forte*, and turning to Sir Edmund Manners, who stood near, she asked him to explain the pictures to her. Sir Edmund, who was quite disconcerted to find himself overlooked in the general excitement, was graciously pleased to answer her appeal; and sitting down by her, gave her some rather remarkable elucidations of the list in her hand; but in truth he was not

very conversant either with pictures or poetry, and knew no more of Reynold's Ugolino or Gainsborough's Blue Boy than of Dante's "Inferno" or Southey's "Thalaba." Luckily Miss Edith Attwood knew even less than he did, and thought him very agreeable; and under his direction pronounced some of the *tableaux* to be very charming; — one especially, in which Ellen represented Saint Winnefried the patron saint of Wales, with the tiny red mark round the throat that showed the story of her martyrdom. But the last was, as had been anticipated, the gem of the evening, and Mr. Egerton, for whom especially it had been devised, was enraptured by it.

In front of the stage was a large crimson velvet chair, in which sat Sir Francis, so perfectly got up as Cromwell, — even the well-known mole remembered, — that it was impossible to mistake him for any one else. Ellen, in the quaint, formal dress of the period, knelt at his feet, looking up appealingly in his face, and pointing to the mirror portrait, in which Stanhope was fully reflected, looking the very type of chivalry in the form of the martyr king. The whole thing was beautifully managed; the lights, the dresses, above all the expressions of the three faces, were so artistically contrived, that the illusion was perfect, and every one crowded round to see more distinctly.

Sir Edmund sprung from the seat near Miss Attwood, clapped his hands, cried out "Bravo! encore!" and the general demand for a repetition of the scene was so urgent, that after a short interval the curtain was again withdrawn, and the scene was repeated. This time, however, there was a slight alteration in the position of the figures in front. Sir Francis, instead of exactly facing the spectators, had moved a little to one side, so as to throw out Ellen's profile more strongly from the dark drapery of the closed window curtains, and at the same time enabling both to front the portrait without being themselves reflected in the mirror. This slight change was a decided improvement in the effect, but turned out most disastrous to the actors, owing to the intense excitement it occasioned in poor Sir Edmund.

"Beautiful! most charming!" he shouted. "Now it is indeed perfection!" and he rushed close up to the gauze veil which alone divided the boudoir from the spot where he

stood. In doing this his foot caught on a nail carelessly left when the carpet was removed, he lost his balance, and only saved himself from pitching head foremost through the gauze by catching at the doorpost. He regained his balance, but knocked down one of the lamps placed to throw the light upon the faces of the actors, a spark fell on the gauze, and in an instant it blazed up. He started back, Miss Edith Attwood screamed, the Venetian blinds closed suddenly, and all was over.

"It was lucky the gauze was so tightly stretched that it burned off without doing further damage," said some one who stood by Mr Egerton. "It would have been a pity if any accident had happened to mar so beautiful a performance."

Mr. Egerton bowed, turned to Sir Edmund to hope he was not hurt, and then went to see that the fire really was completely extinguished. The company meanwhile seemed to think the little incident of the blazing curtain, a startling, but very effective wind-up of the *tableaux*, and hurried away to the refreshment-rooms, and then to the ball-room, never suspecting that any further accident had happened; indeed, it was late in the evening when a whisper ran from group to group that somebody was hurt, but whether Miss Egerton or Sir Francis no one could tell.

In the boudoir a very different scene had taken place. The change in the arrangement of the scene had brought Ellen almost close to the gauze, and when it took fire, she sprang slightly aside to permit Captain Hazlewood to close the Venetians, and thus stop the current of air which was driving the flames towards the actors; while Sir Francis, knowing that Ellen's velvet dress was not inflammable, busied himself in extinguishing the fallen lamp. In doing this he cut his hands severely with the broken glass, and got so scorched by the flames, that his own sufferings completely engrossed him, till a heavy crash caused him to look round, when a terrific sight caught his eye. Stanhope had been placed on a temporary and rather insecure erection of different pieces of furniture, to raise him to a height sufficient to be easily reflected in the mirror; and having been warned that an unguarded movement might bring the whole thing toppling down on their heads, he had

promised to remain quiet till Captain Hazlewood assisted him from his "bad eminence;" but when he perceived that, unobserved by herself, one of Ellen's long hanging lace sleeves had caught fire, and that the flames were almost within reach of the wide lappets of her head-dress, he forgot his own perilous position, and flung himself recklessly from the stage, bringing the whole crazy erection along with him. A sudden blow on his head and arm, which at another moment had stunned him, failed to keep him back when Ellen was in danger. He tore off the lace from her sleeves, and the lappets from her head-dress, but not till the muslin kerchief on her neck had been caught by the flames, and he had no alternative but to endeavour to crush them out by main force. He effected his purpose; but Ellen, to her dying-day, remembered the frenzy of that wild embrace, the pressure of the mailed corslet against her burning neck, and the look of mingled fear, pain, and passionate love which he fixed upon her at that moment.

Although tedious to relate, the whole thing was over in a few seconds; and before Mrs. Beaumont could rush from the green-room to learn the cause of that heavy fall, or Mr. Egerton reach the boudoir from the drawing-room, the fire was extinguished, all was quiet, the room in comparative darkness, and Ellen able to whisper,—

"Don't tell any one I am hurt. Say it is all over—all right."

Captain Hazlewood caught the hint in a moment, and in a cheerful voice assured Mr. Egerton all danger was past. Stanhope had pulled some tables and chairs about his ears, which had made all the racket, but he might tell everybody the fire was out.

"Don't say anything about it to anybody, dear Mr. Egerton," said Mrs. Beaumont. "We would rather have no hubbub. Frank has cut his fingers with the glass, and Ellen has got her head-dress torn, but I shall take care of them both, so be at rest."

And he was satisfied, and went his way. Then, and not till then, Mrs. Beaumont ventured to go near Ellen.

She sickened at the sight. Extended, half-fainting, on the crimson chair, her head resting on Stanhope's shoulder, who knelt by her side, her face ghastly white, her beautiful neck and arms scorched and blistered, the half-burnt shreds

of lace hanging around her in strange disorder, and her long hair, unfastened from the head-dress which had bound it together, falling in tangled masses over her shoulders—she looked like a martyr escaped from the death-pyre; while Stanhope, with his handsome features darkened by smoke, and lighted up by excitement, formed no inapt representative of the daring knight who had snatched her from so dire a fate.

"We must carry her from this place," Mrs. Beaumont whispered, for it seemed profanation to speak aloud. "Frank, do you run for help, and get some brandy for the poor child, or she will never rally. Captain Hazlewood, you and Mr. Stanhope must carry her as she is, in the chair, to the green-room. No one will intrude there. I shall try to find her maid, and join you instantly."

These directions, distinctly and composedly given, seemed to restore to the startled group the presence of mind which had for a moment deserted them. Sir Francis was gone before she had finished speaking, and Captain Hazlewood and Reginald at once prepared to obey her, but when Reginald attempted to move his arm, the pain was so intense that the strong man staggered, and he had only power to murmur. "You take her, Hazlewood. I cannot; my arm is powerless."

Mrs. Beaumont was already gone, so there was nothing for it, but that Captain Hazlewood should lift her from the chair and carry her as if she had been an infant. She gave a faint smile as he took her in his arms, and murmured,—
"I cannot walk I fear—but Reginald—" The passing through the air seemed to heighten the agony of her suffering, for before the sentence was finished her head fell back on his supporting arm; and as he laid her gently on the sofa her fair brow was so contracted with pain that it was frightful to see her.

When Mrs. Beaumont returned, after an unsuccessful search for Martha, she found Ellen in a deep swoon, and Reginald leaning over her with such a look of intense despair in his face, that no other evidence was necessary to show how deep were his feelings towards her. He stood in a stupor of grief, totally forgetful of his own sufferings, though his hands were frightfully burned, one arm hang-

ing helpless by his side, and the blood welling slowly from a deep wound in his forehead.

"Would that I could think of something besides these wet rags to cool the burn!" she exclaimed, with a faint hope that the idea of helping Ellen might rouse him to exertion. "Can you suggest nothing, Reginald?"

She had scarcely expected an answer; but the sound of his own name—it was the first time Mrs. Beaumont had ever called him anything but "Mr. Stanhope"—seemed to restore his senses; and exclaiming,—“Yes, thank God! I can, if you will trust me,” he darted to the cabinet of painting materials which Mr. Egerton had shown him a few hours before, and busied himself among its contents. At first Mrs. Beaumont fancied he was becoming delirious, when he hastily took out bottle after bottle of oil, turpentine, and varnish, and begged her to help him to open them and spread the contents on the burns; but his manner was quite composed, and as soon as she appeared willing to aid him, he told her that lately, when one of the men of his troop had been severely burned by the bursting of a gun, he had got instantaneous relief from the surgeon smearing over the place with painter's oil and mastic varnish, and he again ejaculated his thankfulness that they were so readily at hand, and that chance, or rather Providence, had prevented them from being now at his quarters.

Mrs. Beaumont at once seeing the common sense of such a remedy, readily consented to its use. And no sooner was the mixture applied than a faint colour rose to Ellen's blanched lips, and opening her eyes with a bewildered stare, she fixed them first on Mrs. Beaumont, then on Reginald, and murmured,—

"It seems like heaven to have that pain allayed."

It was difficult for either spectator to restrain their tears. Stanhope shook so with emotion, that the library table on which he leaned trembled under him, but the entrance of the doctor and Sir Francis forced them to shake off their emotion.

Dr. Hunt congratulated Stanhope on his medical skill—told him, with a laugh, that he had taught him a new wrinkle, which would be invaluable in the ironworks, where

he was constantly called in to similar accidents, and declared he could not improve on Dr. Stanhope's practice as regarded his patient, but that he thought he could do the physician himself some good.

Mr. Egerton, who had at last heard the real extent of the accident, and had closely followed Dr. Hunt into the green-room, turned, on hearing these words, to Reginald, and wringing his hand (luckily the left one) till the pain made him nearly scream, assured him nothing he could do for him would be sufficient to repay the depth of his obligations, and insisted that, instead of returning at once to barracks as he wished, he should remain at the Park till he was quite convalescent.

He resisted as long as he could ; but Dr. Hunt decided that he must yield. "Barracks for a man in his state are out of the question. Why, even Sir Francis Vere had suffered from his ride to Heddlesham ; and his injuries are a mere joke to Mr. Stanhope's."

And thus, to use the words of Southey, while

"Each work'd unconsciously the will of fate,
Fate work'd its own the while."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONVALESCENCE.

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate,
All but the page prescribed, their present state."

POPE.

THE few days that followed were trying to every one. Ellen lay in one room suffering from low nervous fever, which at one time threatened to be fatal ; Reginald, alarmingly ill in his little attic chamber, passing from fever and delirium to the stupor of utter exhaustion, seemed to survive only by a miracle ; while poor Sir Francis, himself no slight sufferer, passed his weary days in watching by Stanhope's bed, and trying to soothe Mr. Egerton, who was like a man distracted.

Unaccustomed to illness, the whole household was in

confusion ; Mrs. Egerton, assuming that all fevers were by their nature infectious, endeavoured to keep Kate out of Ellen's room, and never ventured there herself except when actually forced by her husband. The housekeeper and Ellen's old attached maid, Martha, were her constant attendants ; but the many calls on the former necessarily prevented her entire devotion to the poor patient ; and, but for the Dashwoods and Mrs. Beaumont, things had gone ill with both Ellen and Reginald.

At the united request of her brother and Mr. Egerton, Mrs. Beaumont consented to delay her return to Beaumont Grange for a few days longer ; and having despatched the children home before her, she agreed to remain at the Park till some change for the better took place. She dared not say "*or for the worse ;*" but every body felt that that was the more probable event, at least in Reginald's case.

Her coming was a universal benefit. As if by a common consent everybody—doctors, servants, all—appealed to her for advice, direction, or sympathy. Mr. Egerton looked in her truthful eyes to learn what he dared not ask ; little Kate wept out her anxiety for her darling Ellen on her bosom. Even Mrs. Egerton relieved her mind to her by bemoaning her own hard fate in having such anxieties thrust upon her, by abusing all who were concerned in bringing them to pass, from Sir Edmund downwards, "*though,*" she remarked, "*he, poor fellow, meant no evil*"—as if the others had done it purposely. Above all, she found comfort in expatiating on the blessing Mrs. Beaumont enjoyed in being formed of a stronger mould than she was, and being thus enabled to endure the sight of suffering and sickness which shattered her own poor nerves entirely.

Mrs. Beaumont listened patiently, if not sympathizingly, to all these confidences ; glad that they so occupied the selfish woman as to prevent her interference with her own course of duty, nay, even induced her to give a kind of sanction to what she did.

To the invalids themselves her presence was invaluable. Reginald's return to health, or rather his escape from immediate danger, was followed by the most painful depression of spirits. His anxiety about Ellen was extreme, and yet he never mentioned her name, though he eagerly

caught at the slightest allusion to her state. He entreated to be moved to barracks as soon as it was possible, blamed himself for having yielded to the persuasions of others to remain where he was, and expatiated again and again on the immense trouble he was inflicting on every one—at a time, too, when there was more than enough to engross them entirely.

Only a woman's patience, a woman's tender sympathy, could have soothed a mind in such a state ; and Mrs. Beaumont was too true a Christian, too good a woman, to hesitate to afford him the comfort of her frequent presence, though she well knew that Mrs. Egerton could not understand or appreciate her motives for doing so, and professed herself unable to comprehend what such particular people as Mrs. Beaumont thought it right and proper to do. It was enough for her to know that she *was* right ; to find that his sickly fancies gave way before her hopeful spirit and cheerful voice, and to learn from Dr. Hunt that her visits were the bright spots to which he looked forward in his days and nights of pain and wakefulness, and that nothing was more necessary for his recovery than to calm his morbid fancies and inspire him with brighter anticipations.

Nor were similar services unnecessary in Ellen's case. So long as she was too ill to think or speak, no one could be more useful, more unweariedly kind than Judith Dashwood ; she grudged no personal fatigue or trouble, she anticipated every want, she moved about lightly, spoke cheerfully, and was ready with a thousand suggestions for physical comfort. But when Ellen's extreme weakness passed away, and she began to ask questions, and brood over anxious thoughts which she scarcely dared to express, Judith's powers failed her.

Quite unconscious of the extreme excitability of the nerves after such an illness as Ellen's, or of the acuteness of hearing that often accompanies nervous fever, she resolutely evaded all inquiries about her fellow-sufferers, never suspecting that a few whispered words from herself to Mrs. Beaumont had suggested the idea that Reginald was dangerously ill, and that, with her ears sharpened by anxiety, Ellen remarked that when Dr. Hunt quitted the room he did not return on his steps, but followed the corridor towards the wing where Reginald's room was situated. It

was always a considerable time ere he returned ; and other steps, many of which she could not recognize, passed in the same direction. There must be some reason for this, and again she asked if he were really out of danger. Judith, convinced that it would only do her harm to tell her the truth, assured her that both Mr. Stanhope and Sir Francis Vere were most wonderfully recovered, and Ellen dared ask no more ; but she brooded silently over her fears, remembered it was to save her that Reginald had risked so much, and felt how lightly she valued her own life in comparison with his. She recalled each trifling particular of that fatal evening—the expression of his eyes as he caught her in his arms and crushed out the fire against his own breast—the light that had brightened his whole countenance when she awoke from that deadly swoon. Twice had she seen that same light flash up in his griefworn face ; twice had she awoke, as if from death, to see him hanging over her ; and again the thought brought a feeling of strange happiness to her heart, as it had done once before at Vere Court. Yes, even in her misery she felt happy ; felt that, though he had never expressed it in words, still he did love her as she, alas ! loved him.

An accident betrayed to Mary Beaumont the state of her mind, and showed her what it was that had so unaccountably retarded her recovery. Having been late one morning in coming to Ellen's chamber, she found her looking more than usually exhausted, and the moment she appeared she asked with some hesitation whether cousin Frank were still at the Park, and whether he were quite recovered.

"Quite. He was saying to-day that he has really no excuse for staying here longer, only he would like to know you were better first. He has a great liking for his little consin."

Ellen smiled faintly. "He has always been kind to me." She was silent for a moment, and then said, "And Reginald?" The timid, gasping voice with which the name was uttered betrayed the anxiety she durst not express. Her friend perceived it, but answered calmly,—

"He is really better. Frank agrees with me there is a decided improvement to-day."

"You have seen him? Then he must have been very ill?"

"Yes, Ellen, he has been dangerously so; but the worst is past. He is now only very weak. You may trust me, love—I tell you the truth."

"Thank God!" was her only answer; but the few straightforward words had quieted the fears which Judith's well meant deception had only increased. From that day she began to regain her strength, and within a week was carried to the couch in her dressing-room.

The first visitor was her father—the second, Sir Francis, from whose own lips she learned that he was himself quite recovered, and that Stanhope was in the fair way of following his good example.

"If he would but keep himself quiet, Hunt says he would soon get round; but he frets at everything—at being idle, giving trouble, and, most ridiculous fancy of all, at having been the cause of the accident. I tell him it is all nonsense, and that everybody knows he saved your life."

"Tell him *I* think so, at all events," was Ellen's answer—she durst not trust herself to add more than—"and that I hope soon to tell him so with my own lips."

Sir Francis smiled. "That message will do him more good than all Hunt's nostrums; and, as soon as he is well enough, I'll take him to Vere Court, and knock all his sickly fancies out of his head. God bless you, Ellen, dear!—get well quickly for all our sakes;" and kind-hearted Frank Vere left her with a lightened heart; and yet the poor fellow felt that the few earnest words she had uttered were proof, were any wanting, of her interest in Stanhope—her indifference to himself. But, rough as he was, he was thoroughly unselfish, and sought her happiness more than his own.

That same day little Kate was permitted, for the first time, to come and spend an hour with Ellen. Hitherto she had only seen her for a few minutes at a time, and had been so grieved to see her look so thin and pale, that she had been quite unable to control her emotion; but now she was more reconciled to the change in her, and was proud to be trusted to entertain her. She promised to be very careful—to tell her nothing that would over excite her—merely to talk about the very commonest things—and

neither laugh nor cry. At first the struggle was great to keep back both one and other expression of joy when she saw her looking so much better ; and, in spite of the warnings she had received, she expressed her delight and affection in the most ardent manner ; then suddenly recollecting herself, she began to amuse her, as she thought, by giving her a description of everything that she had seen, and heard, and felt since that dreadful night.

"You can't think, Ellen darling, what lots of people have been to inquire for you every day. The lodge gate has never been shut, and I really don't know what mamma would have done without seeing all the people and telling them all about it, and how very provoking it was, and how much anxiety she has had about you all. Poor Sir Edmund Manners has been every day twice to ask about you, and you would be sorry for him if you could hear how he blames himself for it all, though really, as mamma says, it was more Reginald's fault than his that it all happened. Why could he not stand still, like a wise man, instead of pulling all those things down on your heads ! However, it does not much signify who did it ; at all events Sir Edmund is very sorry, and Mrs. Fox says, if you only saw him now, you would be ashamed of being so cruel to him."

"Hush, Kate darling, don't talk such nonsense," interrupted Mrs. Beaumont, "nobody minds what Mrs. Fox says."

"Indeed they do, cousin Mary," said Kate positively ; "at least, mamma does, for I heard her tell her that she spoke very sensibly, and it would be a thousand times better for Ellen to listen to him than to make a love-match with Regi—"

Mrs. Beaumont's hand was on the child's mouth, but it was too late, the mischief was done. Ellen covered her face with her hands and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Ellen dear, dear Ellen, what have I said to vex you ? I did not mean it. It is nonsense. Sir Edmund shan't bother you—I won't let him," cried the impetuous girl, flinging herself on her knees, and covering Ellen's hands with kisses.

"Go away now Kate," said Mrs. Beaumont kindly, but firmly, "Ellen is too weak still to listen to gossip. A mere word unnerves her. Go, love ; you shall come back soon."

Poor Kate went away, weeping bitterly, to confide her

griefs to Judith Dashwood,—it never occurred to her to seek her mother's sympathy ; and Judith told her she was a little goose to talk such nonsense before Ellen. She ought to have known by this time that she was not like other girls, and that any gossip of that kind made her quite unhappy.

Judith was right,—Ellen really was unlike many—we fervently trust not most—girls, and did shrink with a feeling of profanation from having her name coupled, even in jest, with any man's. It vexed her to find that Sir Edmund's rejection was the theme of every gossip's tongue, though she knew well that his own folly had caused it to be so ; but that Mrs. Egerton should still hope she should marry him, and should speak as she had done of Reginald, gave her acute pain.

"Mary!" she said, as soon as she could speak, "what would he think of me could he hear what Kate said just now?"

Mrs. Beaumont was silent for a moment before replying, "My love, men take these silly speeches far more easily than we do. Probably, if he thought twice about it, he would see it was natural enough for a vulgar-minded woman—I beg your pardon, dear, for speaking so of your step-mother—to allow such a thought to pass through her mind."

"If she does so, others will," said Ellen quickly ; "and I cannot tell you how bitterly I should feel it if such foolish gossip reached Reginald's ears. What would he think of her—what of me—if it did?"

"Of her, nothing but what he thinks now ; and as for you, dear Ellen, do you really imagine it could make any difference in your life-long friendship?"

"I trust not ; still—" she hesitated—"still his good opinion is of such value to me, that——" Again she paused.

Mrs. Beaumont put her arm gently round her, and whispered, "My own darling, do not you give way to the dangerous habit of speculating more upon what another may think of your conduct than what you think of it yourself. If you are conscious that you have done nothing of which you have reason to be ashamed, what matters it what others think of you?"

Ellen coloured. "Nothing in reality, but a great deal to

my own feelings," she said, hesitatingly. "Till I left Penmorfa, I was never accustomed to think for myself; and since I came here, I have continued still to lean on others. In short, Mary, I fear that my first thought always has been, and always will be, not what ought *I* to think, but what would others think if I were to do so and so. It is their opinion, not my own, that I look to."

"Theirs or his, Ellen."

How often a simple question unlocks a closed heart! Those four words were the key to Ellen's; and it was a touching thing to see how timidly and shrinkingly, yet how trustingly, she confided all her secret thoughts, and fears, and hopes before her friend, and, when she had ended, laid her head on her bosom, and, looking in her soft grey eyes, whispered, "Oh, Mary, if mamma had lived, she only would have been my confidant."

The tones in which she spoke went to the mother-heart of her friend as she answered, "And you may trust me as you would a mother, dear child. Remember, she was my true friend when I needed one—her child will find as true a one in me. I will answer all you have said by equal frankness. You have not told me much that I did not guess before, dear Ellen; nor is there anything to be ashamed of in what you have told. It is neither wrong nor unmaidenly to feel an interest in one so fascinating as Reginald Stanhope—one, moreover, who is associated with your earliest, happiest days, and to whom you feel yourself now under a deep obligation. So far all is natural—all justifiable; it depends on yourself whether it so continues."

"On myself, Mary?"

"Yes; I repeat it, on yourself. You have no knowledge of his feelings towards you?"

Ellen's eyes fell beneath the calm questioning look that accompanied the inquiry.

"O Mary, Mary, would to heaven I could answer you! I feel as if I had; one moment I think I am certain, the next I doubt, for he has never said one word that could be interpreted into any greater caring for me than—than others have; but yet——"

"Yet you fancy that words are not necessary to show one's feelings? It may be so, Ellen; it is impossible for a

third person to decide such a question ; but it is *wiser* to trust no other sign of affection. Do not think me cold or indifferent, my child,—I am not so in reality ; I only fear lest you should be deceived, or rather should deceive yourself. Suppose you trusted to your own belief, and were mistaken,—what then ? My dear, dear Ellen, these illusions are very fascinating, but very dangerous;—struggle against them with all your might. Pray for strength to check the very beginnings of idolatry in your heart ; for bitter indeed is the fate of a woman who allows herself to love unloved."

"O Mary, how I wish I had never left Penmorfa ! I was safe there—quietly happy—no doubts, no fears, no anxieties. I had then no thought of my heart concealed from my dear grandmother ; but that time is past now for ever. I dare not confide to her what I have done to you."

Mrs. Beaumont was silent ; she knew Mrs. Floyd too well to be surprised by this confession. She was not a person to whom a young girl would think of confiding a love-story, least of all such a tale as she had just heard. At last she said,—

"It has pleased God to place you in a peculiar position in life, dear Ellen. You are apparently surrounded by every blessing that the heart could desire ; but you have no mother—no one to whom you are entitled to unfold every thought of your heart—no one whose duty and delight it is to guide your young mind aright, to increase every pleasure, and soften every sorrow, by natural, entire sympathy. This is the bitter drop in your cup of prosperity ; but, believe me, it would not have been permitted by an almighty, an all-merciful God, had it not been essential for your life-trials. It may be that my fears are idle—I trust they are ; but be on your guard—watch over your heart—trust neither it nor any human power—trust in God alone, and accustom yourself to feel, as well as to believe, that whatever is best for you He will give it you, and you will one day confess that every trial and temptation of your life is permitted for some gracious end."

Ellen was silent. These words sounded strangely in her ears. She felt they were true—she felt they were wise—

but she could not convince herself that such serious teaching would be necessary for her.

Mrs. Beaumont seemed to read what was passing in her heart. "You think I treat this matter too gravely, Ellen. You think that if sorrow or trial come, you will then find it time enough to fall back on such high and holy help. Such has not been my experience : we must be ready *before* the storm or the temptation come to us, helm down, sails well braced, to meet the coming blast. But, alas ! it is only one's own experience that teaches us this. May Heaven avert it from you in the present instance." And stooping down she kissed her fair, pale cheek. "After this, will you ever have courage to confide in me again ?"

"Indeed, indeed, I will. I cannot yet grasp all you tell me ; but I believe it ; and I know, dear Mary, that if ever I need help or comfort in adversity, I may trust in you."

"There is a greater Help, dear love—a surer Comforter ; but I will say no more now. Enough that you believe me—enough that you have faith in my sympathy in every joy and sorrow of yours."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOPE.

"The dubious neutral ground between love and friendship may be long and safely trodden, until he who stands upon it is suddenly called upon to recognize the authority of the one or the other power ; and then it most frequently happens, that he who for years supposed himself to be only a friend, finds himself at once transformed into a lover."—WALTER SCOTT.

It were tedious to trace out day by day the convalescence of the two invalids. It is enough that Reginald yielded to the persuasions of his friends to remain for another fortnight at Egerton Park, and that that fortnight was the turning point of his life. No one doubted the result. Even Mr. Egerton, although generally blind on such occasions, began to believe that after all the boy-and-girl friendship would end in

matrimony. Mrs. Egerton was annoyed at such a finale ; but it was not her fault, and she reconciled herself to the disappointment when she remembered that Ellen would be married when little more than eighteen ; and that Mr. Stanhope was of good family, and had some property, she believed, —or had had, which was nearly as good. The only person who had a doubt on the subject was Sir Francis Vere, and why he doubted he could scarcely explain to his sister, far less to himself. He was a man who felt rather than reasoned, and he had never been quite assured of Reginald's entire candour, although he continued to like him extremely ; indeed, the last few weeks had ripended his liking into friendship, and with Sir Francis the word friendship implied a great deal.

"I wish you were not going away, Mary," he said, the last evening Mrs. Beaumont spent with him at Vere Court ; "I have a kind of superstition that something unpleasant is hanging over the Egerton Park family ; it does not seem to me natural that things should go on from day to day as they are doing. Why does Stanhope not speak out ? It would be better in every way. Even a more timid man than he might dare to hope."

"He hinted to Ellen that he had embarrassments," said Mrs. Beaumont, half interrogatively.

"Embarrassments ! Nonsense, Mary ; an honourable man would not hint but speak plainly. Her friends all take it for granted that things are going on smoothly ; for my part, it seems to me like the calm before a thunderstorm. I wish to goodness it were ended one way or other ; and yet I like the fellow, and, what is more, I feel Ellen likes him. Ah, Mary, Mary, how keen-sighted we become when we see the treasure for which we would give our life-blood bestowed on another. God grant that it be bestowed worthily ! If I were certain of this, I would not grudge it to him."

"I am sure you would not, Frank. They say every man is selfish ; but I know that you care for her happiness more than for your own."

"I do believe I do, and yet I cannot aid it in any way."

"Where we fervently desire to benefit those we love, we find opportunities which no one else would perceive," she

said, laying her hand caressingly on his. "A time may come when you may be of essential service to one or other of them, perhaps to both."

"If it 'do, you may trust me, Mary, I shall not overlook it."

They said no more on the subject then, but a time did come when Sir Francis nobly redeemed his pledge.

Reginald and Ellen meanwhile were entirely unconscious of what was passing around them, or how much they were a subject of speculation to all. Engrossed by the unacknowledged delight of being as it were *forced* into each other's society; enjoying the delicious sensation of returning health; partaking the thousand little privileges of being still invalids, and thus exempt from all claims of the outward world on their time or thoughts, the days passed on unmarked in one happy dream. The quiet mornings in the shady library, the pleasant lounges in the sunny garden, the sweet autumn evenings with their long twilights; the constant interchange of thoughts, and, unawares, of feelings also, formed altogether a life of enchantment from which neither cared to awake; and so gradually had the spell wound itself round them, that they were unaware of its power till a trifling incident aroused one of them at least not only to perceive the full danger by which he was menaced, but also a possible means of escape from it.

A young cornet, of the name of Foljambe, to whose family he had once chanced to be useful, had joined the regiment during Stanhope's illness, and no sooner learned where he was to be found, than he hastened to Egerton Park to see him.

Reginald, gratified by the boy's caring for him, received him cordially, and spoke of him so kindly to the Egertons, that he was invited to repeat his visit to the Park, and frequently did so during Stanhope's stay. Kate was delighted with him, and the merry laughter of the two was a pleasant change after the late silence and depression that had weighed on them all. Kate was very inquisitive as to her new friend's history; questioning him where he lived; whether he had any sisters; whether he could fish, and shoot, and ride well; and even consulting him as to the most becoming length for her pony's tail. Harry Dashwood and

she disagreed about it ; she liked a long, long tail for a lady's pony, he said a bang-tail was far prettier.

"Well, I don't know," said young Foljambe thoughtfully ; "I rather think a switch-tail is the nicest for a lady's horse ; and yet the prettiest girl I ever saw had her pony's just like that hunter's."

"Did the cut of the pony's tail make any difference in the pretty girl's good looks ?" Kate asked, with a laugh.

"Well, I don't know ; perhaps not, only I thought of her, you see, when you asked me the question. I never saw any girl look so well on horseback as Miss Lefevre does."

"Miss Lefevre, that is a French name, is it not ? I did not know French girls could ride well."

"Well, it may be a French name, but she is an English, or rather an Irish girl, and a right pretty one too, if she were not so deadly pale."

"You seem to admire her very much," Kate said, with a little pout of her rich red lip.

"Well, you know, one can't help admiring her, for she really is pretty ; but she is not my style of beauty. It is my cousin Armstrong who raves about her ; and even he says one might as well love a statue of snow as that girl, and my sister Alice declares that she can only be described in the lines of Byron—something about—

" 'So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
You start, for life is wanting there.'"

Now, you know, I don't care myself for that sort of thing—I like life and fun, and all that."

"So do I," said Kate, a little relieved by this profession of faith ; "yet I like to see pretty people too."

"O yes, of course ; so do I ; and I should not object to have Miss Lefevre as my cousin—and they say she will be some day. I am sure her aunt—such a dreadful old woman—tries hard for it, and Armstrong is such a softy I should not wonder if she manages it. And to be sure it is not marrying Mrs. Markham he is, if he marries Miss Lefevre."

Miss Lefevre ! Could it be Terese of whom Foljambe spoke ? And Reginald, unable to conceal his interest, asked the boy whether he had been lately in Ireland, for it was from thence Terese's last letter was dated.

"Well, you know, when my grandfather died, we got the old place in Ireland, near Newcastle, you know, and we have been there three years."

"Ah, that accounts for the brogue you have caught, and which I could not understand."

"And I have caught the brogue, have I?" said the boy, laughing. "Well, I don't much mind. I am an Irishman, and I am proud of my country."

Stanhope put his hand within Foljambe's arm, and led him down one of the long straight walks of the garden in which they had been all lounging together. When they returned he looked thoughtful, but Foljambe as proud as a young lad could be of having had a man he respected so much talking to him so long and in such a friendly manner of home and all its concerns. But it was not poor Foljambe's concerns, it was his own that interested Stanhope. He had easily led the boy to go on talking of his cousin and Miss Lefevre, and he described Mrs. Markham's conduct in a manner so consistent with his own previous knowledge of her, that he could scarcely doubt the truth of his impression that Armstrong was now Terese's accepted suitor. If he were a wealthier man than himself, Mrs. Markham would never hesitate to overlook her niece's previous engagement to him.

What a bound his heart gave when this conviction flashed upon him! And yet, strange as it may seem, he felt aggrieved at the same time, and asked eagerly whether Mrs. Markham's niece seemed as anxious for the marriage as she was.

"Well, you know," was the reply, "one cannot exactly say what she thinks. She accepts Armstrong's bouquets, and lets him drive her out and ride with her, and all that; but whether she does it because Mrs. Markham says she must, or because she likes it, nobody can tell. And Armstrong, poor fellow, what can he do else? He admires her, and so on; but it is my own private opinion that he does not quite relish the connection with the Markhams; and so whether he will ever come to the point who knows? Yet it is a pity for her, poor thing, for she is a beauty, that is certain."

Stanhope listened with mingled annoyance and gratification to Foljambe's words. The many trifling circumstances to which he had alluded showed that the same game was

being played with Armstrong which had been followed with himself; and though he felt now, as formerly, that Terese would not take more part than she could avoid in such a business, he also felt that she was not likely to make any very strenuous resistance to her aunt's strong will. Yet to hear her, who was still his betrothed, alluded to in such slighting terms was gall and wormwood to him, and he said with energy that it was unjust to confound Mrs. Markham's conduct with Miss Lefevre's. Everybody knew that the aunt was an unscrupulous, vulgar-minded, manœuvring woman, and that the niece was a gentle creature, forced against her will to come forward in any way.

"Well, you know, that is what I said to Alice when she spoke so much against Armstrong's folly; but it is difficult to make girls understand these sort of things. Yet Ally is a clever creature enough. But what a 'cute little child that younger Miss Egerton is; I never saw the like. You would fancy she had lived in the world a hundred years at least."

Stanhope smiled, and answered "Yes," rather absently, and then led his young friend back to the others, and flinging himself on the soft turf at Ellen's feet, he leaned his back against the pedestal of the old sundial, and gave himself up to thought. His contemplations were by no means agreeable. He was inclined to blame Terese for giving the slightest grounds for such reports while she was still engaged to him. And yet had he not been still more false to his vows than she had to hers? Not openly, perhaps; but in secret. Had he not asked himself again and again within the last few weeks whether he could marry Terese when so deeply attached to Ellen? For that he was attached to her he no longer concealed from himself. The last illusion had been swept away the night of her birthday. After the events of that evening, the absurd pretence of friendship could not still deceive him, nor, he thought, her either. Yet it was not of her he had to think just now; it was of what his conduct to Terese should be. That was his first duty, and he rejoiced that he had ever looked upon it as such. He had never uttered one word to Ellen that he could wish unsaid, were all his new budding hopes blighted, all Foljambe's story false, and were he still bound to Terese. Alas! Stanhope, it is

not words alone that touch a woman's heart, or teach her to believe herself beloved.

There are looks and tones that dart
An instant sunshine through the heart,
As if the soul that minute caught
A treasure it through life had sought.

There are indications of interest displayed in a thousand ways, allusions to a casually expressed taste, fulfilments of a scarcely uttered wish, innumerable trifles that show her to be the constant object of a man's thoughts, which are even more to a woman than the sweetest words ever breathed in her ear. Such proofs of affection Stanhope had daily bestowed on Ellen, and yet he flattered himself that all was well. So it is with most men; they imagine—or act as if they imagined—that till the “Open sesame” is uttered, the door of a woman's heart is as firmly closed against them as the robbers' cave was against Ali Baba.

Stanhope was only roused from his deep reverie when Foljambe took leave of the party, who all rose as he did so, and accompanied him towards the house. Ellen happened to be next Reginald, and as they went along, said, “I fear Mr. Foljambe has brought you unpleasant tidings?”

He looked at her inquiringly—had she at all understood the importance of the communication he had received? He thought not; and yet the opportunity of unburdening his mind to her was so tempting, that he could scarcely resist it. Mrs. Markham's conduct seemed to absolve him of his promise of secrecy—at all events, entitled him to hint at the position in which he now stood. He *would* speak! These thoughts flashed through his mind during a moment of silence, yet his voice trembled slightly as he replied, “I can scarcely say they are altogether unpleasant; but I confess the news he accidentally gave me has startled me, and I cannot help thinking of the strange revolution it may make in—in the fate of—of some people in whom I am greatly interested.”

He hoped that she might follow up this answer by some further question; but as she only looked interested, he continued:—“I cannot quite decide how one ought to act in such circumstances; the story may be true,—from what I know of the parties I should say it was; but any mistake

on this point would be attended by most awkward consequences."

"I did not hear what Mr. Foljambe said," she replied; "I fancied he was speaking of some imprudent marriage his cousin was about to make to a pretty vulgar girl."

Stanhope winced. "Her relations are vulgar, not herself," he said, hastily; "but if you like, I shall tell you about it. I should wish to hear an unbiassed opinion on the affair."

"I shall be glad to listen," she said, with a smile; "though as to my opinion, Kate's is better than mine on such matters."

"You remember our talking over the plot of *Corinne* at the last assembly, and that when you spoke so strongly against Lord Nevill's conduct, I told you that there are occasions on which a man may be drawn into something of the kind without any evil intention?"

"Yes, I remember perfectly."

"I was going to give this very instance, when we were interrupted. Foljambe's intelligence has reminded me of it. Shall I tell you now?"

"Pray do."

"A friend of mine was left—as I was myself—early his own master. He was little more than nineteen when he joined the head-quarters of our regiment in Scotland. You know that the young men of our regiment were exposed to many temptations to extravagance and dissipation. To some he yielded, but I can safely aver in his favour, that he never addressed a woman save with the utmost respect and courtesy,—so much so, as to make him almost a proverb among a set of fellows who were less scrupulous than himself in this, as in many other things. There were several married men among our officers, and you may imagine that their wives were not very refined; but there were some kind-hearted, good souls among them, who took a motherly interest in the younger officers, and were desirous to find wives among their own connections for those who had any fortune. In this they were tolerably successful, all but one, and she was the least respected of them all. She was the wife of the surgeon, a good-hearted fellow enough, but one who had little control over his own family. At the time we were in Scotland his household consisted only

of his wife, an orphan niece, and his infant son—the rest of his large family were left in Ireland. This niece was really a pretty girl, very gentle, very refined, looking, in short, such a contrast to her vulgar, bustling aunt, that our fellows used to call her the ‘Snowdrop,’ to which her fragile, drooping loveliness had a certain resemblance. Her aunt insisted on carrying her everywhere with her; and it was impossible not to pity a creature so young and elegant, constantly forced into association with the commonplace people about her. She looked as though she had undergone much suffering; but if it were so, no one knew it; she was intimate with no one, always reserved, shy, and cold.”

“Poor girl, what a picture you draw of her. How could your friend fail to be interested in such a creature?”

“He *was* interested; but in those days he cared more for horses and hounds than for a lady’s bright eyes. Still he was civil to her, as every man in the regiment was; but people began to allege that she seemed less wretched when conversing with him than at any other time. At all events, her aunt had resolved that they should make a match of it. She was already eighteen, and her cousin, a few years younger, would, no doubt, find her a formidable rival; so no means were left untried to attain the desired object. But it failed entirely, till one night——” He paused.

“You interest me, Reginald,” she said eagerly;—“one night——”

“It was New Year’s eve, there was a large party assembled. I cannot tell you how it happened, but by some machinations or other of the aunt’s, the—my friend was led on to drink deeply. It was not a common failing,—generally he was a most temperate man; but when the party broke up, all congratulated him on having plighted his faith to—the ‘Snowdrop.’ He declared they were mistaken, he had not even an intention of the kind. They laughingly replied that that might be true enough, still that he had done it, intention or no intention, and that no man of honour could draw back after having committed himself as he had done. This staggered him, and his next interview with Mrs. Markham showed him they were right. He was most entirely committed, and could not retract without an *esclandre*, which he did not care to encounter. They were

both poor, however, so the marriage was delayed, and the engagement, at the lady's request, was kept secret. They parted—she returned to Ireland, he followed his profession. The course of his duty brought him to a pleasant neighbourhood, and looking upon himself as an engaged man, he entered into society without any fear of the consequences, either to himself or others. Nor did he awake from his dream of security, until he found that his heart was no longer in his own keeping."

"And then?" Ellen asked anxiously; for there was a concentration in Stanhope's look and voice, as he told the tale, that fascinated her.

"And then," he said gravely, "he bitterly repented his imprudence, and resolved to seek safety in flight. Circumstances he could not control—or which, at least, he thought he could not—prevented him from doing this,—indeed, seemed to fling him almost against his will into the danger he sought to avoid——"

"And the young lady, did she care for him?"

"He thought—he feared she did; but he never asked her."

"That was great self-control."

"Do you really think so?" and he turned round and fixed upon her so searching a look that she trembled as she replied,—

"I do think it was."

He drew a long breath, and then said,—“I am glad you think so. But to me it seems that, as a man of honour, he could not have acted otherwise. But is that all he should have done? Should it end there? Ought he to hold to his engagement, or break it off at once?”

"I cannot tell. For his own sake I should say yes; but when I remember your account of the poor pale Snowdrop, it seems so cruel to her."

"Is a hand without a heart worth having, Ellen?"

She turned away from the large grey eyes that looked at her so earnestly, as if resolved to read her answer in her countenance, and said, with some agitation, "O no, certainly; but yet if she be so lonely in the world, if she do not know that it is a hand without a heart, she might in time——"

"But if," he interrupted eagerly,—“if, as Foljambe tells me, she too has found a fresh object of attraction, is there any doubt what course he should pursue?”

"None, assuredly. He can then have no difficulty, I should say, in deciding."

"None! What then would you do in his place?"

"Can you ask me, Reginald? It is perfectly plain, I should say. He should tell her the state of his own heart, and trust to her generosity to answer him in the same spirit."

"You are right, Ellen; that is the honourable course."

"Is there another?"

"I thought there was. I do not think so now. But"—and he stopped abruptly—"if she is less frank, less honourable—if she hold him to his promise?"

"No woman could be so unwomanly," said Ellen, hastily.

"And if she be, no man is forced to do evil that good may come—to swear to love, honour, and cherish one when his heart is devoted to another."

CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

"Il y a des pierres précieuses qui, malgré leur petitesse, ont plus de valeur que les royaumes entiers; il y a aussi des pensées et des sentiments, des résolutions, des actions, que personne ne connaît, et qui cependant ont plus de valeur que les vertus de tout un siècle."—A. LA FONTAINE.

REGINALD wrote to Terese that night;—the next brought him the intelligence that he was gazetted captain, and Colonel Wyndham volunteered to tell him that, if he still desired long leave, he had little doubt that it could be obtained; adding at the same time that Spencer had returned at last.

"I thought we were never to be honoured with his society at head-quarters."

"Family interest strong at the Horse-guards, Stanhope! I am glad you, and not he, were the first for promotion."

Between ourselves, I don't like the fellow. He always contrives to make mischief."

"We know each other too well in the 20th to quarrel with our best friends through any of Spencer's machinations."

"I hope it may be so. Are you quite fit for duty now? You look better than before your accident."

"Quite, thank you, colonel, except that my arm is rather useless. I could not yet try a fall with Hazlewood, or even bowl out Freefield at your next cricket match; but I can do my duty well enough."

"Then we shall have you back to-morrow. By the way, Stanhope, you have not answered about leave. I want to know because of our ball. I should like you to be present if you could manage it."

"If you wish me to be present, I shall be so," he answered heartily. "Indeed, I begin to hope that I shall not be obliged to leave Heddlesham at present. I shall not do so unless I find it absolutely necessary."

"Ah, that is well. I don't wish you to go, especially now that Spencer has joined again. Still, if you do want leave, ask without hesitation."

"Thank you, colonel, I shall."

"Do you know, Stanhope, that I hope to be able to prevail on Miss Egerton to come to our ball. She is quite recovered, Mrs. Egerton tells me."

"Wonderfully so; still I doubt her going to a ball."

"I mean to try and prevail on her, nevertheless."

"It is utterly impossible," Ellen said, when her stepmother first suggested the idea of her going to the garrison ball. "In the first place, I am not able for the exertion; in the second, how can a poor scarred wretch, such as I am, ever go to a public place again!"

"Nonsense, Ellen! You really must go to the ball. You can both walk and ride now; and as to driving, you are perpetually in that little carriage Sir Edmund got for you."

Ellen smiled. She knew, if Mrs. Egerton did not, that all danger in that quarter was now over, and that Sir Edmund was quite aware that she had agreed to have him choose the pony-carriage only because she wished to prove that she had

no unkindly feeling towards him. Mrs. Egerton, however, had as great a capacity as Mr. Macawber for hoping that something would turn up for good, in quarters where every one else knew it could not.

"So," she added, conclusively, "that excuse will not serve you."

"But my other will," Ellen replied with a smile. "Even you, mamma, cannot flatter me so much as to allow that I can ever wear full dress again."

"Perhaps not full dress exactly, though I am sure Mr. Stanhope's strange remedy has scarcely allowed a single trace of the burns to remain. Still I do not think your dress need stand in the way. I shall manage all that. Another fortnight will make a great difference in your strength. At all events don't decide against it till you dine at the Dashwoods' on Friday."

Ellen saw that she must go to the ball, however unwillingly, so contested the point no longer.

The Dashwoods' dinner party was the first opportunity Ellen had had of seeing Reginald since he left the Park, and it was impossible not to be struck by the change in his appearance. He was ghastly pale; and his manner had a feverish restlessness about it very unlike his usual selfpossession. He came up to the Egertons the moment they entered, congratulated Ellen on looking so well, was certain she was quite able to go to the ball, and expressed a hope she would do so.

"I have promised to try."

"I am very glad of it. I was afraid that——"

"Miss Egerton," said Mrs. Dashwood, interrupting him, "Mr. Spencer desires the pleasure of being introduced to you." And Mr. Spencer, with a half-smile, half-bow to Stanhope, slipped into an empty chair beside her, and began to talk—as some men do talk—in a manner that completely prevented her from withdrawing her attention from him for a single instant.

He took her down to dinner; engrossed her there as he had done in the drawing-room; and in other circumstances she might have been perhaps amused by his conversation, superficial and rather ill-natured though it was; but at present she could only think how ill Reginald looked.

He seemed to take no interest in what was passing, but leaned back in his chair, careless of the impression he produced on Louisa Manners, who sat next him.

Mr. Spencer even seemed struck by his appearance ; for after looking at him once or twice, with a strange expression in his eyes, he turned to Ellen and said, with a peculiarity of manner which both confused and annoyed her, "Can you account, Miss Egerton, for Stanhope's sudden depression of spirits?"

"No," she said, vexed to find herself blushing violently, "unless he has not regained his strength so thoroughly as he supposed."

"No one can doubt," he replied with a smile, "that the air of Egerton Park is more likely to re-establish a man's health and spirits than dull quarters at Heddlesham."

Ellen answered this remark only by a bow.

He continued : "I do not think he shows his usual discrimination in preferring the air of the Green Isle to either. What is your opinion, Miss Egerton?" Then, seeing her look puzzled, he added, "Perhaps you do not know that he has applied for leave to go to Ireland?"

Applied for leave without telling her! A pang shot through Ellen's heart as she heard the news ; but she had sufficient control over herself to answer calmly, "I think he is quite right to try change of air of any kind,—he looks very ill." And then she added in a firmer voice, "You have probably heard the cause of his illness, and how much I owe to his courage and presence of mind?"

"Yes, all Heddlesham rings with the exploits of the hero of Egerton Park," Spencer replied, with such a peculiar intonation, that Ellen felt that there was a covert sneer in the answer, although it was difficult to analyze where it shone forth.

"You hear our good friend Stanhope goes immediately to Ireland?" said Colonel Wyndham's voice close to Ellen's ear on the other side.

"Yes, Mr. Spencer has been telling me so. He looks so ill that, though we shall miss him, we can scarcely regret his absence, if he return looking more like himself."

"You are right, Miss Egerton ; that is all we want. We

all like Stanhope,—we shall all miss him ; but, as you say, if he return looking more like himself——”

Mrs. Dashwood made the move at the moment, and the goodnatured colonel was saved the difficulty of finishing his sentence, a thing he seldom could accomplish with ease to himself or satisfaction to his hearer.

When the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, Reginald again came up straight to where she sat, and said abruptly, “I suppose Spencer told you I am going next week to Ireland. I was about to tell you so myself when he interrupted me. I only decided on it this morning.”

“Shall you be long absent ?”

“I trust not ; it is business calls me away, otherwise——”
He stopped abruptly.

“You would have delayed your departure till after the ball,” Ellen said, nervously intent on concealing her regret at parting by saying something.

“I do remain for the ball ; Colonel Wyndham insists upon it. You will dance our usual dances with me, will you not ?”

“Certainly, if I dance at all ; but I am not sure that I shall. I go to please Mrs. Egerton, not because I expect to enjoy it. Ah ! I fear I shall never enjoy another ball as I did the last assembly.”

He was silent ; he remembered that night well, and the strange feeling it had given him to see her so happy, so unconscious of all evil, when he was beginning to see the meshes that had insensibly been woven round them. “I fear I shall be much engaged professionally before I go to Ireland,” he said, after a short silence ; “so you must not be surprised if I do not come to the Park as usual.”

Ellen made no answer. She felt she dared not trust her voice to speak. Reginald paused an instant for her reply, and, disappointed at her silence, could not resist saying,—

“Shall you miss me when I am gone, Ellen ?”

He felt he had no right to ask such a question ; but he could not regret he had done so, when the bright colour suddenly flushed her cheeks, tears rose to her blue eyes, and she answered with a quivering voice,—

“Reginald, you know I shall ;” and then added, “We shall all miss you. Colonel Wyndham and I were saying so at dinner.”

The transparent duplicity of this speech did not deceive him. Ellen's answer was not in her words alone : her voice, her blush, her tearful eyes, told far more than they did ; and the sudden light that gleamed across Reginald's countenance showed how well he read the truth. But he was satisfied with having done so, and, abruptly turning the subject, he glanced across the room to where Spencer was doing the agreeable to Louisa Manners, and asked, "How do you like him ?"

"He seems pleasant ; but I do not think *you* like him ?"

"No, I do not, — none of us do ; and if you will take my advice, you will never get intimate with him. He is one of Lord de Rochefort's set, and they are not to be trusted in anything."

"Lord de Rochefort has not been in the country since I returned."

"So much the better. Keep clear of him and all his friends ; and, if you can, prevent Mrs. Egerton from allowing them ever to visit at the Park."

Ellen shook her head.

"I have no power to prevent it," she said.

"I fear you are right. Still the warning may be of use to yourself and your friends ;—men understand men better than women do."

The conversation was interrupted soon after, and the party broke up.

As they quitted Chevely, Stanhope placing his arm within Sir Francis Vere's, asked leave to walk so far with him on his return home. To this request he readily acceded ; but they had gone some little distance before either spoke. At last Sir Francis said,—

"I fear, Stanhope, you have not rallied as you expected. You should have come to Vere Court instead of returning to barracks. You could have managed it easily."

"I am not ill, I assure you," he replied, "unless mental suffering can be called illness ; for, to speak plainly, Vere, I am very wretched, and, what is far worse, I fear my folly and my imprudence will cause suffering to others than myself."

"Can I be of any use to you ? You know I don't profess much ; but if I can help you, I will."

"You can help me very much by listening to what I have to tell, and advising me how to act. I want a friend, Vere, and I believe you will act a friend's part to me."

Sir Francis made no other answer than to gripe Stanhope's slender fingers in his own Herculean grasp; but Reginald felt that there was more heart shown in that rude pressure than in innumerable protestations. He therefore proceeded without further hesitation to tell him his whole history without exaggeration or apology, giving him a simple statement of the facts he had lately given Ellen, though he did not scruple to speak more plainly to him than he had done to her of the particulars of his enforced engagement to Terese.

"Yet I never really regretted it till I came to Heddlesham," he said; and then he paused in evident emotion, and had difficulty in resuming his story. But he did so at last, describing with frankness and sincerity the pain he suffered on discovering the state of his own heart,—his hope that he alone had been the sufferer,—the *tableaux* party and its startling conclusion,—the news he had learned from Foljambe,—the advice he had received from Ellen, and last of all, the letter he had written to Terese, frankly stating his own feelings, without alluding to what he had heard with regard to Mr. Armstrong.

"And her answer?" asked Sir Francis, breathlessly.

"The answer came from her aunt. She tells me that the agitation my note occasioned Terese prevented her from writing herself, and that such a subject cannot be discussed by letter; that I must therefore obtain leave as speedily as possible, and join them at Newcastle."

"And you intend to obey this command, — to give in without a struggle?"

"To obey it!—Yes! To give in!—*Never!* I would rather cut off my right hand than marry one woman when my whole heart and soul are given to another."

Again Sir Francis crushed his small hand in his.

"Hold to that, my dear fellow; let no wiles of this woman turn you from your purpose; and when you come back to Heddlesham free, then may God speed you with Ellen."

"And if meanwhile they would persuade her that I have acted dishonourably towards her ——?"

"I shall defend you."

"God bless you, Vere!" And so they parted. Reginald returned to his quarters with a lighter heart; and Sir Francis, with the calm energy of a pure heart and unselfish spirit, turned towards his own solitary home.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GARRISON BALL.

"They tell me 'tis decided you depart;—

"Tis wise, 'tis well; but not the less a pain."

It was not professional business only that prevented Reginald Stanhope from going to Egerton Park as formerly, but a conviction that if he did so, he might in some chance moment forget that he was not already free, and openly express the feelings which as yet he had never distinctly avowed in words. Still, when his leave was granted, when the day of the garrison ball arrived, and he knew that the next morning before daylight he must be on his most detested yet most hopeful journey, he thought that it would be wrong, as well as impolitic, not to pay a farewell visit.

It was a lovely October day,—the tints of the foliage so brightly varied, the colours of earth and sky so deep and glowing, that it was difficult to believe "summer's gone, and all the flowers are dying." He walked slowly along the well-known lane that led from the Heddlesham road to the West Lodge, and thought over the many pleasant days on which he had traced it with a light heart; and now, in spite of himself, a gloom hung over him which he could not shake off.

If he should find himself entangled once more in Mrs. Markham's toils? Impossible! Formerly he was a weak boy, with nothing to make him regret the step he was forced to take, save dislike to Mrs. Markham herself, and

regret at his own embarrassments. Now he was a man!—a man, moreover, deeply attached to one—oh, heavens!—how infinitely superior to Terese Lefevre! With such armour of proof to guard him, even Mrs. Markham's arts must be powerless.

The sound of the lodge gates creaking on their hinges, the roll of wheels and tramp of horses, broke his reverie: he looked up, and recognized the Egerton Park carriage. It contained Mrs. Egerton and Kate, who, calling to the coachman to draw up, beckoned him to come to them.

"Oh, Reginald, what a pity you did not come sooner! Mamma and I have such lots to do, we cannot turn back, and I wanted so to see you before you went to Ireland. Are you ever coming back? Mr. Spencer says you are not, but that we must bid you an eternal farewell."

Stanhope reddened. "Mr. Spencer is an ingenious inventor of stories," he said quickly; "I wish you would not believe anything he says of me."

"But you are going to Ireland to-morrow?"

"Yes; but expect to be back immediately."

"If you are not home for Christmas, I shall believe every word Mr. Spencer says."

"If I am not back long, long before that, Kate, we are never likely to meet again; so adieu, my child; God bless you! Try to keep my memory green till we meet again. I must detain you no longer."

Stanhope squeezed the child's hand in both of his. Mrs. Egerton said, laughingly, that as they were getting so sentimental she must put an end to the interview; but *she* hoped to see Captain Stanhope in the evening.

"Is your sister at home?" he asked of Kate.

"Yes; we would not let her tire herself by paying visits. We thought the ball quite enough for her, so sent her to the West Wood to keep quiet. You may go to her, however, if you like. *You* won't weary her."

The carriage drove on, and Reginald turned in the direction indicated. The West Wood had been a favourite meeting-place of the Dashwoods and Veres throughout the summer. Many a time had the large merry party of young people assembled under the wide-spreading ivy-covered boughs of a huge oak, their joyous tones and happy hearts in harmony

with the tranquil scene around them ; and as Reginald slowly trod the familiar path, he retraced again the bright days that were gone, and asked himself whether they could ever return.

He found Ellen at the favourite seat. As his step caught her ear, she looked up, and, smiling, rose to meet him.

"Kate told me you were here, and said I might join you," he said, seating himself by her ;—"she assured me I should not disturb your meditations."

The slight formality of this speech troubled Ellen ; she gave one quick glance at him, saw he was still pale and haggard-looking, and said quickly, "Oh, no, you do not disturb me in the least. I was doing nothing, not even thinking ; only dreamily enjoying the calm beauty of this heavenly day."

"It is a heavenly day," he repeated ; "I hope it is a good omen for my to-night's journey."

"To-night ! Do you go to-night ?" and the sparkling eye grew dim, and the colour, which had risen so vividly to her cheek, died away.

"I thought I had told you that business called me to Ireland ?"

"You did tell me ; but I did not think it was to-night. Indeed I fancied you were to be at the ball."

"I go by the morning mail. I would not miss the ball for a great deal. Do you not remember you promised me the first dance, and the one before supper ? I cannot let you forget them. We always dance these together."

"I did not forget them, I assure you."

There was a long silence ; it was broken by Stanhope. "You do not ask me, as Kate did, if I shall be long away."

"Shall you ?" and the eyes, though not the words, showed how eagerly she hung on the answer.

"I hope not. If so, I shall write to you. May I not ? I should like to tell you of the success—I earnestly hope it will be the success—of your advice to my friend."

"My advice, Reginald ? What can you mean ?"

"Do you not remember what I told you of a friend of mine who had made a rash engagement from which he was anxious to escape, and that you advised that he should act openly and honourably to his betrothed ?"

"I did not *advise* it," she said, in great agitation; "I only said what I should have done in his place."

"And it was done that very night! From what I have told you, you may guess the rest. As yet I am not entitled to say more; but you will understand—will do me justice, whatever others may tell you of me!"

The words rushed from his lips as if a torrent had broken from its bounds and overleaped all obstacles. She sat looking at him in a kind of stupor; then, putting her hand to her brow, she said with difficulty, "This has come upon me very suddenly! I cannot grasp it, yet I will not pretend to say I do not understand you *now*. Believe me, I did not guess the truth *then*."

"And yet you gave me the only advice you could have given. I have acted upon it; and you yourself prophesied all would come right. You believe this, do you not, Ellen?" And he took her hand in both of his, and looked eagerly into her eyes: they fell beneath his.

"Do not ask me, Reginald; it is better not," she whispered.

"Only bid me God speed, and I will ask no more," he said, clasping the imprisoned fingers more and more closely.

For a moment her courage failed her,—her head drooped,—her bosom heaved; but by a strong effort she recovered herself, and murmured, "I do. But now you must leave me, Reginald. I am weak still; the slightest agitation unnerves me."

"Oh! not yet, Ellen. I have so much to say to you,—so much that we may one day regret was left unsaid."

She shook her head. "Say it to me when you return, Reginald, but not now, I beg of you."

"Then I must go—must leave you? Will you not even let me accompany you home? I cannot bear to leave you here."

"You must," she said, gently, but firmly; then in an altered tone, she added, "Do go, Reginald; I cannot bear this much longer,—it tears my very heartstrings;—for heaven's sake go! and may the Almighty direct you aright, my dear old friend."

"I obey you, Ellen," he said, mournfully. "I have only one word to add. Sir Francis Vere has my full confidence.

“If ever you doubt me, ask him what you ought to think. And now I will go. To-night we meet and part in a crowd, so I must bid you good-bye here.”

She put out her hand to him; but he caught her in his arms, pressed her convulsively to his heart, and with the half-audible words, “God bless my darling,” left her.

She sat for a time leaning against the tree, stunned by the whirling thoughts that filled her brain. His own story! It was this, then, that gave that strangeness to his manner of late. This doubt of himself—this dread of being with her? Mary Beaumont’s warning was very wise. Why did she not think more of it?—why allow herself to be carried away by the happiness of being with him, instead of thinking of the possible reason for his silence? But at all events, it was not indifference that occasioned his silence; he really did care for her, did love her, as she, God help her! loved him. Yet should his present journey fail of success;—should they never meet again, or at least never as they had done? Why think of this now? it could not, must not be. He had said that no man of honour *dared* marry one woman when he loved another; and he was a man of honour,—a true man. How came he to make Sir Francis Vere his confidant? Yet she was glad he had done so; for if any one spoke against him, cousin Frank would disprove it. How she wished she were not going to the ball to-night! Yet she must do so. There had been so much said about it,—so much stress laid on her going. And she would see him once more;—that was worth any sacrifice of her own inclinations!

And then she rose from the bench, and walked slowly and falteringly towards the house. How miserably weak she was! Her steps tottered as if she had just risen from the bed of sickness; and a little while ago she had fancied her whole spring of elastic youth returned to her. It was the first time she had learned how powerfully the mind and feelings react on the physical frame; but it was not the last. She reached home; she took refuge in the boudoir, now associated with such stirring incidents of her short life. She threw herself on the low divan; she tried to compose her thoughts by looking abroad on the face of nature, as she had been wont to do, and to believe that no sorrow, no anxiety,

could resist its soothing influence. It was not sorrow she felt now, but a restless longing for certainty, for rest, for peace, which made her turn away impatiently from the stillness, the sunshiny brightness before her.

At last her thoughts were distracted from their vague wanderings by Kate's entrance. She was in high spirits. They had met Colonel Wyndham and Captain Hazlewood close to barracks, and they had insisted that mamma and she should go in and see their arrangements. Nothing could be prettier. Some of the rooms were fitted up like tents, with arms and trophies round them; and the ugly, dirty staircase was quite hid with crimson cloth and evergreens; and the chandeliers were beautiful, and the ball-room, Ellen could not imagine how pretty it was!

Ellen listened to her rapturous descriptions with apparent interest, smiled when she did, and said most earnestly how much she wished that Kate were going in her stead.

"Do you know the colonel tried to persuade mamma to let me go with you; but she will not, all I can say; so you must tell me all about it when you come back. I wish, darling, you did not look so tired. It is this hot day, I suppose. Who would fancy it October? By the way, Ellen, did you see Reginald? But I need not ask you, for we met him as we were leaving the barracks, and he begged me to tell you that he has got your talisman ring mended at last. It is quite safe now. He would have gone for it, but mamma had no time to wait for it; so he says you shall have it at the ball."

Ellen made no remark, but wished that Mrs. Egerton had waited for it.

When she entered the drawing-room that evening, dressed for the ball, both Mr. Egerton and Kate exclaimed, "How prettily you are dressed to-night, Ellen! I never saw you look better."

And, indeed, she did look very lovely in what is certainly to most people a very becoming dress,—a most perfectly fitting high-bodied white muslin, trimmed with delicate lace. The soft ruche round her beautifully-formed throat,—the floating sleeves,—the deep, full flounces, gave the whole a very ethereal effect, and the scarlet geraniums with which it was

looped up were particularly approved of by Kate, though she thought she ought to have put some in her hair as well.

"So I thought at first," Mrs. Egerton said; "but I rather think now that Ellen has shown better taste in doing without. There is something particularly *distingué* in these thick plaits twisted round and round her head; I do not know where Martha learned to arrange them so tastefully. And as to your ringlets, Ellen, they are perfect;" yet, with the improving finger of an experienced chaperon, she tried to alter the fall of one of the rich brown curls, that hung in large, heavy, rounded rings, so different from the hideous corkscrew curls then in vogue.

"I half wish I were active enough to go with you," Mr. Egerton said, as he glanced admiringly at his wife and daughter; "I should have been proud to escort two such pretty, well-dressed women."

"It is not too late even yet, papa."

"Oh yes, quite too late; get you gone, both of you; I have been longing for a quiet evening to study the new 'Edinburgh.'"

Ellen's reappearance was greeted with delight by many to whom her gentleness and sweetness of disposition, her universal kindness and courteousness had endeared her more than either she or they were aware of. She was gratified by their sympathy, but she was annoyed to find herself so much an object of public attention. Nervous at the thought of meeting Reginald again, and feeling disinclined for exertion of any kind, she wished to avoid taking any active part in the evening's amusement; but finding herself unable to do so without exciting remark, she went through the fatigue bravely, the very pain it caused her to do so giving her a brilliancy of colour which made her look particularly well.

Sir Francis Verc, however, remarked that during the intervals between the dances her cheek grew pale, her eye dim, and that when not actually engaged in conversation, her face had a worn, anxious expression, very different from that he had observed upon to his sister on the night of the last assembly.

"I wish," he said, as he took her to supper, "I wish you would go home at once. I am sure you are regularly fagged. You ought not to overtask your strength so much."

"I am rather tired ; but I shall get through with it. It would vex Mrs. Egerton to leave so soon."

"Well, then, let us take refuge in this corner, near the pillar. You can keep quiet if you like ; I shall not talk to you ; and you see there is no one on the other side to force you to exert yourself."

"Thank you, cousin Frank ; you are as considerate and careful of me as Mary would be."

Sir Francis's lip quivered a little, but instead of making any answer, he applied himself assiduously to help the game pie before him, and to keep up a constant little stream of chatter with Miss Edith Attwood, who sat on his other side ; so Ellen leaned her weary head against the pillar, and tried to gather strength to part with Reginald. He had not yet given her back her ring. How she hoped it might be restored without any curious eyes seeing and misinterpreting so simple an action !

At this moment a boyish voice, which she recognized as that of Foljambe, was heard from the other side of the pillar speaking very earnestly. She paid little heed to what he said at first ; but hearing her own name mentioned, she involuntarily listened, and heard him say,—

"Well, you know, I think the whole story a humbug from beginning to end ; and I don't like that fellow Spencer one bit for saying such a thing. The girl is a pretty girl enough, and the aunt a regular bad one ; still I will not believe that Stanhope ever did anything so dishonourable."

Ellen's heart beat fast at these words, but she tried to still its palpitations, that she might hear the answer. It was in a woman's voice, she thought Albina Winterton's.

"Of course one does not like to believe such a thing ; still you officers fancy yourselves exempt from common rules in such matters. It is what one hears of continually."

"Well, I don't know ; but I never heard of such a thing."

"If it were true," said a deeper voice, which Ellen instantly recognized as Captain Hazlewood's, "Stanhope would be sent to Coventry without scruple ; but none of us believe it."

"Mr. Foljambe acknowledges the existence of both the

aunt and niece," remarked the lady ; " he even confesses that Captain Stanhope spoke of them as if well acquainted with them, and defended the young lady against the attacks made upon her. That looks suspicious."

" It is only what every man would have done in similar circumstances," said Hazlewood.

" Well, I may be mistaken,—very probably I am ; but I have no reason to think so well of Mr. Stanhope as you do. Indeed——"

A remark from Sir Francis at her sudden paleness prevented Ellen from hearing what followed. When she was able to listen again, Miss Winterton was still speaking.

" All I have to say is, that Mr. Spencer gave the whole story so minutely, even to the very words exchanged on the occasion, that nothing will ever persuade me that a marriage did not take place ; and were I a friend of Miss Egerton's, I should certainly tell her so. Good heavens ! fancy what one would feel on finding one had married a man who could be prosecuted for bigamy !"

Poor Ellen heard no more. The agony she had endured in the last few moments was more than her shattered nerves could stand. She did not believe what they said ;—she knew it was not true. Yet to hear him so spoken of,—to hear her own name brought into such a discussion, was too much. She remembered nothing more until she found herself lying on a sofa in the deserted ball-room, with Mrs. Egerton, Mrs. Dashwood, and Judith hanging over her.

" Are you better, love ?" said her stepmother, more kindly than she had spoken to her for some weeks. " Sir Francis tells me he feared all night that this would happen, you looked so tired out. I did not know you were so weak still, dear. But we shall get away quietly. Sir Francis has gone for the carriage. We shall be home directly."

Ellen was relieved by these words,—they showed her that the real cause of her faintness was unknown ; and she did not attempt to enlighten them. She lay still, her head resting on Judith's shoulder, and tried to feel it *was* only because she was so weak that this foolish story had unnerved her. She knew the truth ; and yet—and yet how dreadful it was to think that others could so misjudge him.

Sir Francis returned at last ;—the carriage was waiting ;—

they had better go before the supper-party returned to the ball-room. Ellen, with Judith's assistance, was able to rise, and, clinging to his arm, to cross the short passage leading to the carriage. As they did so he whispered, "You must not believe it, Ellen. He has been imprudent, but not guilty. I know all about it. I shall tell you the truth when you are able to hear it."

"I know it," she answered ;—"I do not believe what they said, but it shocked me,"—and she put her hand to her aching head. "I am so very weak."

As they reached the carriage, Stanhope joined them in great agitation. "What has happened?" he said. "What has made her ill? For heaven's sake tell me!"

"The heat and fatigue were too much for her," Sir Francis said, calmly; "but she is all right now."

"Oh yes," she eagerly exclaimed; "the fresh air has quite revived me. It is a lovely night for your journey, Reginald;" and she shivered with cold and agitation.

"You must not detain her, Stanhope," Sir Francis said in a kind but firm voice. "Say adieu like a good fellow, and be off with you."

Reginald felt inclined to resent the well-meant interference; but remembering in what a friendly manner Sir Francis had always acted towards him, he controlled his temper, and obeyed him. He pressed her hand warmly in both of his, bade God bless her, and turned away. Then suddenly remembering her ring, he hurried back, thrust it into her hand, and said, "Remember that superstition connected with the diamond—so long as it continues bright, so is my faith to you."

He was gone—Mrs. Egerton had reached the carriage—entered it: it drove off, and the garrison ball was over.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MARRIAGE.

"I tell thee, death were far more merciful
Than such a blow. It is death to the heart,—
Death to its first affections, its sweet hopes,
The young religion of its guileless faith.
Henceforth the well is troubled at the spring.
The waves run clear no longer." L. E. L.

From Ellen to Mrs. Beaumont.

"HAUTONVILLE, December 15.

"I MUST write to you, dear Mary;—to no one else do I dare to express the misery of this dreadful day. It is all over; the hopes that buoyed me up, the faith I had in him, are swept away. He is married. I know no more. We are here, away from home. Your brother is the only creature from whom I could learn the truth. Yet what does it matter now—the bolt is shot—he is married, that is enough. Oh, Mary! I hate myself when I think how utterly miserable this news had made me. I believed in him as in myself. I felt assured that all that was said against him was false. I despised your warnings. I believed in him, and now 'the last plank to which I clung is shattered.' I have it under his own hand. This is what he writes to me:—

"It is done—I am married—I cannot tell you the particulars—I cannot write them even to Vere; but I beseech you both delay your judgment of me till I can explain all to you. I have written to your father; I have told him you were both aware of my engagement. Forgive me for saying this;—I do it for all our sakes,—yours and hers, as well as my own.—R. S.'

"I am thankful we are from home at present. Mrs. Egerton takes the matter very quietly; says she always fancied that Sir Francis, Captain Stanhope, and I had a secret understanding about something, and she laughs at all the foolish reports that have been flying through Heddlesham

on the subject. My dear father is not with us ; so I have been saved the pain of having his searching eye upon me just yet. I have written to him, to tell him that I was aware of the engagement ; that I and cousin Frank were in his confidence. And I am thankful—very, very thankful—that I can do so with truth. Believe me, Mary, I feel less for myself than him ; my most earnest desire is to save him from blame ;—and I think I shall do so. Everybody here knows I have heard from him ; that I am the first person to whom he has written ; and I thank Heaven I have contrived to pick up enough of information regarding her, from Fred Foljambe, through Kate, to be able to answer all the questions they ask me.

“Then my late illness has all along been an excellent apology for looking so thin and pale. They do not know that it is anxiety, not ill-health, that oppresses me. I have been in a wretched state of restlessness lately, unable to settle to any occupation ; thinking, thinking,—hoping against hope,—struggling with myself ; but all in vain. I have tried every means to drown thought,—have ridden, walked, danced continually, in the hope that when fairly exhausted I might sleep. But there is no sleep for me to-night. We have had a large party here ;—everybody has been speaking of him,—he made himself such a favourite at the time of the riots, and I have been talking and laughing as loud as any, telling them, over and over again, of the little sketch of Miss Lefevre he made for Kate,—which you saw, though I did not,—and how he tore it up because it did not do her justice. And at dinner they drank the bride and bridegroom’s health, and wished them health and happiness. God knows there was no prayer more earnest than mine for both, and yet my hand trembled so that I could scarcely raise the glass to my lips. And now I feel so tired and worn out, I would give the world to close my eyes and sleep ; but it is impossible, and so I write to you instead.

“I have been looking out on the night. How calm and peaceful it is ! The quiet stars look down from the frosty skies—not a sound is in the air ;—as that German song he used to sing so well, says,—

“All is peace and rest,—the world is calm as the grave ;
Why canst not thou rest, O my soul ?—rest thou too.”

Alas ! there is no rest for a heart torn as mine is. But why weary you with such useless, selfish repinings ? Simply because you told me I might write to you openly, sincerely, without fear of being misunderstood or unsympathized with. And to whom else dare I be open and sincere ?

“ Write to me soon—one of your long, kind, wise letters. I do so need sympathy,—I do so need counsel. Would that I could have both from your lips ! Would that I could lay my tired head on your breast, and be soothed to rest by your loving words, your tender caresses. I yearn for some comfort ; and where can I seek it but from you, who alone know my heart ?—Always your own,

“ ELLEN.”

And this was the end of all.

What availed it now that Sir Francis Vere had exerted himself to put down Spencer’s malicious insinuations that Stanhope, though under the guise of a bachelor, was in reality a married man ? What mattered it that their own intimate circle believed that the Egertons had all along been cognizant of his engagement ?—that they looked upon Ellen as a model confidante, and congratulated her on her power of keeping a secret ? The rest of the Heddlesham world did not scruple to say that, married or not married, Captain Stanhope had not acted fairly in permitting Miss Egerton’s name to be so frequently coupled with his ; for, as Mrs. Fox observed, who could help doing so when they were seldom seen apart, and when so good a match as Sir Edmund Manners had been refused, simply because Mr. Stanhope cried him down ?

Luckily for Ellen, none of these reports reached her ears. From Hautonville she and Mrs. Egerton proceeded to pay one or two other country visits, and did not return to Egerton Park till the nine days’ wonder of the marriage was over, and people were more anxious to know when the Stanhopes were to be in Heddlesham, and what the bride was like, than how the marriage took place, or who had been in their confidence.

Ellen returned home with a wretched cold, caught, Mrs. Egerton said, when seeing the hounds throw off at Lord Elmsley’s. “ The dear child has such spirits, she

would go to see them, although the east wind was blowing terrifically." Ellen said nothing ; for if the truth were told, she rather rejoiced that her wilful imprudence had brought about so desirable a result.

"It is provoking," Mrs. Egerton continued, "because I wished to fix a day to invite the Stanhopes. I hear they come in the end of the week, to be in time for the Chevely ball, and of course we should like to have them here first. But dear Ellen's cold is so bad we must delay it, I suspect, unless we could ask them to come to us in the friendly way Captain Stanhope used to drop in. But that I fear must not be. However, Ellen, I shall go to Fenley's, leave our cards and a note, and see what can be done. Will you go with us to Heddlesham, Mr. Spencer?"

These words seemed to realize to Ellen, more than anything had yet done, the truth of the changed position in which they now stood with Reginald. How should she meet him? The nearer the time came, the more terrible that thought seemed to her. She had taken it for granted that, as she became more accustomed to hear him spoken of as a married man, the idea would become at once familiar and endurable ; but the thought of seeing him in these very rooms with his wife,—of recalling what was and what might have been,—was maddening. She moved restlessly on the sofa, on which she had flung herself as Mrs. Egerton quitted the room. Why could she not thrust those miserable thoughts of Reginald from her mind? Everything about it was so wretched. He had shown her he did not, could not love his wife ; and yet he had yielded to his fate at once ;—he of the strong will and high principle had yielded without a struggle to a tyrannical woman's will. What could explanations avail? The thing was done,—that was enough. She would listen to no explanations. It was not right that such a subject should be mooted between them now. They must henceforward be strangers to one another in everything but name. They might—nay must—meet as before ; but the sweet confidence of childhood, the trusting affection of later years, was gone. The idol she had worshipped was fallen, fallen, fallen—shattered before her eyes !

She had read and heard that the saddest fate that a woman can have, is to love and have her love unrequited.

She doubted that. To her her own trial seemed a thousand times worse,—to love, to know herself beloved, and yet to feel that one act of weakness—it could be only weakness, call it by what name he pleased—had raised an eternal barrier between them; and yet to the world they must be, as they had been, friends,—life-long friends. What would she not do to avoid the necessity of meeting him! What sacrifice would she not make to hide from him and others how deeply she had been wounded! Hardly had the unspoken aspiration filled her mind, when a means of fulfilling her wishes was offered her, and in a form most fascinating to her. The door opened, and Sir Francis Vere was announced.

It was their first meeting since Stanhope's marriage, and his agitation was greater even than hers. It is often thus men have less control over their emotions than women; not, perhaps, because they feel more deeply, but because it is one of the earliest lessons a woman learns,—to suffer and be *silent*. Well is it for her when she learns to be *strong* also; for without suffering there is no strength.

"Ellen," he said, after some few sentences had been exchanged between them, "I come on a strange errand. I cannot tell what you will think of it; but I shall run the risk. I wish to save you what pain and annoyance I can."

"I know you do; I have no truer friend than cousin Frank."

"You have not heard again from Ireland?" (She shook her head.) "Nor have I. I cannot understand it; but I need not attempt to conceal from you that there has been much talk about this marriage."

"I feel there must have been."

"Stanhope is very severely blamed. I have done what I can to defend him; but I can myself find so little apology for his conduct, that it has been difficult for me to do so with any degree of success."

"Yet it was to you he bade me apply, should I hear him blamed unjustly."

"Ellen, if you can assure me that he is blamed unjustly, I will defend him even more valorously than I have done. I ask you plainly, may I do so? Is he free from the imputations they have cast upon him? Have you throughout

known how he was situated? Were you prepared for this marriage?"

"We never are prepared for the—shipwreck of our hopes," Ellen was about to say; but, stopping abruptly, she said, "I will speak to you as openly as I would do to Mary;—I was not prepared;—I cannot realize it even now; but I would make any sacrifice rather than that others should know this bitter truth. Can you not help me? Can you not save me from this agony?"

"There is but one way, and I fear you will not be willing to agree to it."

"Try me; you do not know what I would endure to gain such an end."

For a moment he was silent, as if screwing his courage to say something he dreaded to utter; at last he stopped in his walk up and down the room, and, leaning on the mantel-piece near her sofa, looked down upon her with his honest brown eyes, and said, half-mournfully, half-nervously, "Ellen, the means of which I speak is one which will, I fear, startle you,—which may even lead you to think I take an undue advantage of the confidence which chance has led you to place in me; but I see no other. Have you sufficient faith in me to engage yourself to me as my future wife? Do not start, and turn away at such a question. I shall not hurry you to any after-decision. I shall not even hold you to your promise, should you find by-and-by that you cannot willingly keep it. But in the mean while it would clear you from all difficulties; no one save our own two selves would know *when* this engagement began; it would silence all silly gossip; it would——"

"Spare me, Frank—spare me!"

"My dear Ellen, I would not pain you if I could help it; but desperate maladies require desperate remedies; and though I am as fully aware as you can be of the sacrifice you would make in listening to my proposal, I still believe it might end well. I will not deny that, had any one told me a few months ago that I should have spoken to you as I have done, I should have indignantly denied it, have said I was too proud to seek a heart that could not love as I love. But time changes men as much as things,—suffering makes us very humble; and I have suffered, Ellen, more than you can

believe, in seeing others preferred before me. But it has not hardened my heart, nor will it harden yours. I earnestly believe you already esteem me and trust me. These are good foundations for affection, and it will come, trust me it will, if—if—" he hesitated, then added in a steady voice, "if you can so far conquer yourself as to promise to *try* that it will do so. I will give you time,—years if you will, only let me in the mean while have some claim on you, some title to hold your interests as my own, to counsel you, watch over you, guard you from all evil."

The manner in which these startling words were uttered, the earnest expression of his honest face, the truthful glance of his eyes, touched Ellen, and with lightning rapidity there rushed through her mind a thousand reasons for and against compliance with the unselfish proposal. She did already like, esteem, trust him. She knew no one whom she so thoroughly respected,—not even Reginald could bear comparison with cousin Frank in goodness and trustworthiness; and yet she knew—she felt—she could not, ought not to listen to him.

"No, no," she said, while tears gushed from her eyes, "we must not do evil that good may come; we must not fall into a like error to his. Thank you, cousin Frank, a thousand and a thousand times; but I should be a mean, cowardly wretch if I availed myself of your generous proposal. Be my friend, as you have always been, but do not, I beseech you, let this subject ever be touched upon between us again."

"Ah, Ellen, in endeavouring to do good I have done only evil. I fear you will not now trust me as you have done."

"Indeed I will, cousin Frank. You have given me the strongest proof a man can give of his interest in a woman. Would it not be very foolishness to distrust your friendship for that? I know you will not misunderstand me when I say that henceforward we shall be better friends than ever; for now, indeed, I fully appreciate the unselfishness, the true nobility of your character."

"Hush, Ellen, hush! do not unman me," he said with burning cheek and moistened eyes; "I am a soft-hearted creature, and to hear you speak in that way is more than I can bear. It is enough that you promise still to let me

feel myself your friend—that will help me to go through much.”

“It will help me, too, to know that, whatever happens, I may come to you without reserve, and say, ‘Cousin Frank, I know not what to do—give me your aid.’”

“You shall have it, Ellen, when and wherever you choose to seek it. You know they are to be at the Dashwoods,” he added suddenly.

“I know. Judith showed me his note; and mamma wishes them to dine here first. If they come, you will?”

“Most certainly.”

“God bless you, Frank! Your hearty, cheerful readiness gives me courage.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MEETING.

“Ah! this is indeed human life, when in the rushing, noisy crowd, and amid sounds of gladness and a thousand mingling emotions, distinctly audible to the ear of thought are the pulsations of some melancholy string of the heart.”—LONGFELLOW.

MRS. EGERTON returned unsuccessful from her visit to Fenley's lodgings. Captain and Mrs. Stanhope were not expected till the 24th, and the landlady believed they were engaged out that evening; at least, so she understood from the captain's note.

“So you see, Ellen, I had to do the best I could; and I added a line to say we hoped to see them at Chevely, and could then arrange when they should come to us. You have no idea how nicely Mrs. Fenley has done up her rooms. You remember those hideous green curtains that used to make everybody look so ill? Well, they are taken down, and amber ones put up instead; and the prettiest oval table is in the drawing-room, and such a comfortable *chaise longue*, it really looks quite nice and home-like. I looked about; for you know, Ellen, it would be right to send something down, to seem as if we were thinking of them, and I really could not tell what was wanting.”

"Could we not send some flowers? They make a room look bright, and he used to be so fond of flowers," Ellen said.

"Ah, yes, that will do charmingly; and you might send a bouquet for Mrs. Stanhope specially,—you arrange them so prettily, my dear; and I think it would be a nice attention on your part."

Ellen looked up with a startled air, and said, "Do you think so, mamma?"

"Indeed I do; for to tell you the truth—of course you won't mind such nonsense; but I find that—that people are a little on the *qui vive* to find out really whether you were or were not in Reginald's—I beg his pardon, Captain Stanhope's confidence; and so, my love, I would rather you did not omit any little civility to the bride. I dare say she will be a tiresome little thing. Brides always are decided bores,—one has to pay them so much attention; still, as Reginald—when shall I learn to call him Captain Stanhope?—as Captain Stanhope was here so constantly, one must do one's best. Only fancy that wretched Mrs. Brudenell telling Spencer that everybody thought you engaged to Reginald! Of course I said that such a marriage was rather beneath Miss Egerton; and he at once saw it was. But as he observes, people will say things of that kind when there is any unusual intimacy; they won't take into account how such intimacies begin."

Mrs. Egerton rattled on; Ellen sat silent, and listened, or seemed to listen, while her thoughts were far away,—now in the glorious past, now in the gloomy future, and then thinking of dear cousin Frank's earnest words and unselfish devotion, and then—and then back to the uncomfortable present.

The 24th came. The greenhouses were ransacked for flowers for the bride, and nothing could be prettier than the bouquet Ellen arranged for her, of pure white flowers,—camellias, azalias, and heath, and one or two snowdrops. It was despatched with a message of inquiry whether Captain and Mrs. Stanhope had arrived. The answer was in the affirmative,—they had arrived, and were to be at Chevely in the evening.

Until this message reached her, Ellen scarcely knew how eagerly she had clung to the hope that they might not come in time,—that one day more might pass before they met.

Again and again she went through, in imagination, this trying first interview, each time in a new form and under new circumstances ; but none satisfied her,—they only bewildered her more and more. Could she not plead indisposition, and stay at home ? Alas, it must be done some day, so she had better go through with it at once. Frank—he began to be “Frank” now, at least in her thoughts—Frank was to come early and go with them ; and she had promised to dance first with him and then with Harry Dashwood. Harry wanted her to waltz. Should she do so ? She was greatly tempted ; but it was better not. True, it would show Reginald that others could prevail where he had failed. But he would probably not remark it, or if he did, it was better not to give him the slightest apology for alluding to old times and old habits. She wondered whether he would waltz now. She remembered he had once said, half in joke, that when he married he would only waltz with his wife. How she longed to see that wife ; how she hoped she might be able to like her when she did know her. The ‘Snow-drop,’ it was a pretty name. He said it suited her.

“Eight o’clock, Martha ? Impossible ! It cannot yet be time to dress !” She had been thinking, dreaming a full hour.

“I have put out the blue velvet for to-night, Miss Egerton,” said Martha. “You forgot to say what you would wear ; but Miss Kate begs you will put it on,—it suits you, she thinks ; and she would wish if you would wear a few jewels instead of flowers, for the prettiest have gone to Mrs. Stanhope, she says.”

“Very well, Martha, that will do very nicely ;” and Ellen, greatly to her abigail’s amazement, submitted to everything she proposed.

Hitherto she had never worn jewels, though those she had were very handsome ; for it was a fancy of Reginald’s that nothing but natural flowers were becoming to a girl ; and hitherto she had strictly followed his lead on this as on almost every other point. But now, as Martha fastened the jewelled bandeau in her hair, and clasped the necklace and bracelets round her throat and arms, she thought—

“I must not be guided by his taste now. He will not know, but I shall feel the change.”

She was leaving her room, when Kate came to see whether she had followed her directions, and whether she looked well. She was very complimentary in her remarks.

"I was sure a grandiose style of dress would suit you, so I told Harry that I should insist on your going to Chevely *en grande tenue*. How nicely Madame Falaise has made your gown. I wish other people would wear high dresses as you do. That dark blue suits you exactly; and what lovely point lace! Those sleeves are exquisite, and those opals and diamonds—I do not wonder at Anne of Gierstein having an opal as her talisman. But, Ellen, you have forgot *your* talisman; you have left your ring in your jewel-case;" and the child forced it on her finger. Ellen had purposely left it there; she had too many associations with that ring to make her wish ever to wear it again; but not liking to show Kate her feelings, she made no resistance.

"And you have no bouquet either, darling! Have you sent *all* the flowers to Mrs. Stanhope?"

Ellen blushed, and said "No;" but as she intended to take a fan, she did not wish to have a bouquet as well. She did not say, "It used to be Reginald's privilege to carry my bouquet. That cannot be now; but no one else shall have it."

"Well! I suppose you must take your own way; but I would never go out without one. Do you hear papa is actually going to-night?"

Ellen started. It had been one comfort to her that he would not see her first interview with Reginald; but she said, "I am glad he has yielded at last. Mrs. Dashwood had quite set her heart on his going."

It was not Mrs. Dashwood's wishes, however, that had induced Mr. Egerton to overcome his usual indolence, but the reports his wife had brought back to him from her round of visits that day, which, speaking of the expectations which Reginald's intimacy at the Park had aroused among the Heddlesham gossips, had suggested to him some unpleasant suspicions, which he desired to remove by watching his first meeting with Ellen. He did not actually disbelieve that he had made her and Sir Francis his confidants; but he could not help, when the fancy was once put into his head, remembering that Ellen's health and spirits had of late

declined rapidly ; and though nervous weakness, brought on by her accident, might in some degree account for it, other causes might do so as well. At all events, he was determined to use his own eyes on the present occasion, and act accordingly. It was all very well for Mrs. Egerton to say they must be civil to the Stanhopes, lest people should continue to talk ; but he was not a man to be forced into anything of that kind by impertinent tattlers. If Reginald Stanhope had behaved as that long-tongued creature Spencer hinted, he should never darken his doors again.

With these thoughts filling his mind, Mr. Egerton prepared to accompany his wife and daughter to Chevely. Luckily for Ellen, she never guessed that such ideas could cross her father's mind ;—she only thought of herself.

"Ah ! Frank," Mr. Egerton exclaimed, as Sir Francis joined them in the hall as they were entering the carriage, "I am glad you are going with us. Desperately cold night, is it not ? Are you well wrapped up, Ellen, love ? You must try no experiments while that nasty little cough keeps hold of you : " and he wrapped her fur cloak closely round her. As he did so, he looked at her with a strange half-sad, half-admiring gaze. "Ellen, dear, I did not know before you were so pretty ; " and then he whispered, "You are the very image of your mother in that dress ; she had one very like it twenty years ago." And then, as if ashamed of exposing his feelings even to his daughter, he turned with a laughing remark to his wife, and declared that she must make her *entrée* before him at Chevely, for it would be impossible otherwise to pass through the doorway with proper effect.

"If you do stay behind, Granville," she said calmly, "I hope you will not tread on my train, as Captain Hazlewood did on Mrs. Dashwood's the other night. You never saw anything more absurd than her endeavours to advance while held back by his weight."

Mrs. Egerton's chatter, kept up without intermission till they reached Chevely, was a relief to all parties, and Judith's hearty greeting,—Mrs. Dashwood's delight to find she had prevailed on Mr. Egerton to come to her,—the lights, the crowd, the buzz of conversation round her,—produced their effect on Ellen ; her pale cheek gradually gained a tinge of

colour, her nervous fears became less overpowering, and she was able by-and-by to glance round the room and assure herself he was not there.

"Shall we go to the dancing-room at once?" Sir Francis said; "we are quite blocking up the doorway."

"Oh, pray do, Miss Egerton," said Mrs. Fox, who was standing by watching all that was going on; "Mr. Dashwood is so anxious that things should begin, and is quite put out by the officers being so late. Even Captain Stanhope is behind time to-night. He never used to be so before his marriage; but it would not do for a bride to come too soon, I suppose."

"Of course not," Sir Francis said; "the company should all be assembled before the queen comes; and we hear wonderful accounts of Mrs. Stanhope's beauty."

"I hope she is as pretty as we expect," Ellen said, as calmly as she could; "we are all very anxious to see her." And then she moved away, and Mrs. Fox looked after her, and thought to herself,

"Then, after all, it is Sir Francis, not Mr. Spencer! So much the better;—he is of a good stock;" and then she turned to Mrs. Egerton and complimented her on Miss Egerton looking so very well. "She had heard she was ill, and had been quite concerned, but to-night she looked nicely."

"She never has quite recovered her strength since that shocking accident, and has had a little cough of late," Mrs. Egerton coldly replied; "but she was determined to be here to-night to meet her old friend Captain Stanhope."

"Ah! that is so pretty of her. And how well jewels suit her, ma'am. The Floyds have very handsome jewels."

"Very handsome indeed."

"And that velvet dress, ma'am, and the point, it is astonishing a young girl becomes it all so well. But to be sure, it makes her look more *en suite*—if one dare hint such a thing, Mrs. Egerton—with Sir Francis."

Mrs. Egerton laughed—she could not help it—at Mrs. Fox's elegant compliment and implied interrogatory, and said, "You go too fast, Mrs. Fox; we must not marry off *all* our friends at once. Ah! here come the Stanhopes at last;" and advancing with an eagerness, which, if not real,

was very well imitated, she shook Reginald's hand heartily, begged to be introduced to his wife, introducing herself meanwhile with the prettiest air of cordiality possible; and in short threw so much dust into Mrs. Fox's eyes, that a good deal fell into her own, and she fancied herself on the very friendliest terms possible with Reginald.

Stanhope looked both surprised and gratified by her reception; but though Mr. Egerton clapped him on the shoulder, and said,—

"Ah, Stanhope, you stole a march on us, which nothing but so fair an apology can excuse," he grew very red, and seemed unable to make any reply.

"Is this the nervousness of a new position, or something worse?" thought Mr. Egerton, as he marked his embarrassment. It was difficult to distinguish; so he assumed the more charitable interpretation, and after a few words to the bride, proposed to take her into the dancing-room, and introduce her to his daughter.

"I was going to inquire for her," Stanhope said, growing redder and redder; "some one told me she was ill; and not seeing her here, I feared——"

"Oh dear, no," Mrs. Egerton interrupted, "she is not ill, only dancing. You must not forget, Captain Stanhope, that balls still have attractions to others, though perhaps no longer to you."

The entrance of a whole party of military saved him the necessity of answering her, and in the bustle of introductions and congratulations that followed, he contrived to slip away from the doorway, and find his way to the ball-room. Ellen was dancing with Harry Dashwood, looking brilliantly beautiful,—her colour bright, her eyes sparkling, and her whole expression full of life and animation. He had imagined a very different picture, and in spite of himself he felt both amazed and mortified. "Had he been in her place, he would have felt and acted differently. And yet she was right! It would never have done to wear the willow for him. What a fool! what a wretch he was to wish to see her miserable,—her whom he pretended to love so dearly!" He turned and left the room; but scarcely had he re-entered the other apartment, when Colonel Wyndham came

up to him, and in the kindest manner began to congratulate him on his wife's beauty.

"She is the only lady belonging to the 20th," he said, "so we shall all make much of her. I am glad to see that she is less lazily inclined than you are;—she dances, though you do not."

Reginald looked puzzled. "I left her with Mr. Egerton," he said.

"And you fancy a pretty girl like that would be content to spend an evening at a ball with an elderly gentleman, however pleasant? No, no, Stanhope. If you will marry a pretty wife, you must expect to see her admired. I saw Spencer carry her off to waltz."

Stanhope bit his lip, but made no answer.

"Perhaps waltzing is a forbidden pleasure in your marital code?" he added rather gauchely.

"That is a point which I leave entirely to my wife," he answered gravely; "I should be sorry to interfere in any way with what gives her pleasure."

Colonel Wyndham slightly raised his eyebrows, but remarked, "That's right, my good fellow,—do at Rome as the Romans do; and if you take my advice, you will follow her example. I like to see my young people enjoying themselves, and you used to be an indefatigable dancer."

Reginald made no other answer than a bow, as he turned once more towards the ball-room. He would go and seek Ellen,—it was foolish, it was cowardly to delay;—and he glanced round the circle of dancers. She was not among them. How could she be?—*she* never waltzed; and at the moment his wife floated by on Spencer's arm. He felt inclined to quit the room a second time; but resisting the impulse, he leaned against the doorway and watched the dancers.

"Nothing recalls the past like music;" these words rang through his memory. They were true, quite true. That waltz which they were now playing he had often listened to with Ellen—it was a favourite with them both. That melancholy rise and fall they had likened to the night wind through the trees, to the echo of a vanished happiness, to the last dying farewell of a friend; and these recollections, com-

bined with a thousand others, came thronging through his brain with startling distinctness. He felt as a man does who revisits the scenes of youth after years of absence,—sees others fill the place of those with whom he used to be familiar, and feels himself a stranger in thought and person to those with whom he is now thrown in contact. It seemed as if a century had passed since he was last in these rooms, or listened to that melancholy Alexandrine waltz. Yet it was scarce two months since. Two months! Why he was a young man then, with hope and life spread out in bright array before him;—now he was old in heart and spirit. As one of our best writers expresses it, “he might henceforth endure life, he could never enjoy it again.”

There was Mrs. Stanhope still waltzing with Spencer. He wished she did not waltz, especially with that man, and he turned angrily away. As he did so, he found himself face to face with Ellen,—she was leaning on Sir Francis Vere’s arm; but the moment she recognized him, she withdrew her hand from cousin Frank’s, and offering it to Reginald, said very quietly,—

“You came late.”

“Yes; Mrs. Stanhope had some little difficulty on first arriving——” He left the sentence unfinished.

Ellen, perceiving his embarrassment, conquered her own nervousness, and said quickly, “It was hard on her to appear at a ball the very night of her arrival. Do point her out to me.”

“She is waltzing with Spencer.”

The tone in which he spoke caused Ellen involuntarily to draw back a step; and even Sir Francis looked distressed, but he had sufficient presence of mind to say—

“You cannot mean that that mere girl—that child with the string of pearls in her hair—is Mrs. Stanhope?”

“She is, I assure you.”

“How very, very lovely she is!” Ellen exclaimed with undisguised admiration, “and what an interesting expression of face!” She dared say no more, for in truth the expression was interesting because it was so very sad. Even when she smiled, there was more of sorrow than mirth in her countenance, and yet she was very lovely. Though of the middle height, her figure was so slight as to give you the impression

of extreme youth ; her face was of marble paleness, not the pallor of ill-health, but of natural complexion ; her features were beautifully chiselled, especially the mouth, and the round curved lines from the chin to the throat ; her lips were full and flexible ; her eyes large, black, and melting, with a dreamy haze over them, which added much to the melancholy cast of her face ; while her hair, as black and glossy as the raven's wing, was wrapped in rich wavy folds round her small and exquisitely-shaped head. She wore her marriage dress of white silk and lace ; a single row of pearls was round her throat, another twisted in her hair ; while the bouquet Ellen had sent was tightly grasped in her small delicate hand.

Ellen looked at her with a curious feeling at her heart, strangely combining interest and compassion, but of which compassion was the principal ingredient. There was something listless and wearied in her expression as she listened to Spencer's nothings, more as if she were undergoing a penance than a pleasure ; and when he tried to make her continue the waltz, she shook her head decidedly, and moved towards the other room. As she did so her eyes fell on the group in the doorway. In an instant her whole countenance altered,—a vivid colour suffused her cheek, her eyes sparkled like diamonds, as she suddenly addressed a few words to Spencer. His answer seemed to give her pleasure, and yet to confuse her, for at first she made a few steps towards them, then, as if losing courage, she drew back, made a courtous inclination to Spencer, and seated herself on an ottoman at the end of the ball-room. He seemed inclined to sit down by her ; but she must have prevented him ; for, after a few words exchanged between them, he too bowed and left her.

All this passed so rapidly that Ellen had no time to collect her thoughts and decide what she ought to do, until Reginald said formally, " May I introduce Mrs. Stanhope to you ? I shall bring her to you, if you will allow it."

" Rather take me to her," she said, her natural kindly impulse guiding her to what she ought to do ; and with a glance to Sir Francis to accompany them, she placed her hand on Reginald's offered arm, and they crossed the room together. She knew many eyes were upon them, but she

felt, as we often do feel when put to the test, that she could go through the ordeal well, and she did so; but what passed between them she never could remember. She knew that those large, dark, dreamy-looking eyes had shone upon her with a curious wavering light, which fascinated and yet made her feel uncomfortable, although their expression was full of feeling, she could almost have said of affliction towards her; she remembered that the voice which said, "So you are Ellen Egerton," was a sweet low voice, that thrilled through her heart, from the very depth of its beautiful tones; and that as she had thanked her for the flowers, Mrs. Stanhope had raised them to her lips, as if she longed rather to kiss the donor than the blossoms she had sent her; and yet, with all this, there was a something so strange and unearthly about the lovely, delicate creature, that Ellen almost shrunk from her, even while she admired her,—she was so much more like a spirit than a living woman.

Reginald stood by quite silent, his arms crossed over his chest, his mouth closely set, his eyes watching them with a steady gaze, that insensibly influenced both; and Ellen was beginning to feel the tension on her nerves too tightly strained to endure much longer, when Sir Francis came forward and relieved her by addressing himself directly to Mrs. Stanhope. Then Reginald, as he moved aside to give him more room, glided round to Ellen's other side, and said,

"Are you engaged for the next dance?"

"Yes."

"For the next again?"

"It is a waltz."

"May I take you to supper?"

"I have promised to go with Colonel Wyndham. Besides," and she tried to smile, "Mrs. Dashwood will expect your escort. You forget that your present position entitles you to that privilege."

"Would you rather *not* dance with me?" he said, with a slight frown, which he tried to conceal by a feigned laugh.

"Indeed," she said earnestly, "I am engaged for every dance except—except the one before supper."

A smile replaced the frown, but it was a melancholy one. *That* dance had formerly been always reserved for him.

"Then, if you will permit me, we will dance that together."

"I shall be very glad." The words came as matters of course; but the sudden, quick look he gave her caused the colour to rise to her cheek, and she felt deeply grateful to Fred Foljambe when he rushed up to remind her that she had promised to dance this quadrille with him.

Sir Francis and Mrs. Stanhope were their *vis-à-vis*, and young Foljambe's ready flow of talk was of great use to her—it roused her to exertion. But the dance over, the next half-hour was very trying to her. People came and went, talking and laughing; and she talked and laughed too; warmly admired Mrs. Stanhope when asked what she thought of her, and agreed that Captain Stanhope had shown great good taste in his selection. She listened to an account of a great ball which had, as Fred Foljambe said, "just come off with a dash" at the Wintertons'; heard how Ensign Belfield had proposed there to Edith Attwood, and her state of delight on the occasion, contrasting so strongly with her parents' annoyance at so undesirable a result;—she was told how foolishly Albina Winterton had flirted with Mr. Spencer to pique Colonel Wyndham, but all in vain;—she gave ear, in short, to all the gossip of a ball-room, and yet through it all found herself listening to every syllable uttered by one voice, whose tones she had once been able to distinguish at an immense distance; and now she heard every word he uttered, saw every movement he made, and felt by a kind of instinct how often his eyes were turned on her;—she knew that he was now waiting to come and claim her as his partner for the next dance, and the few formal words he had already spoken to her made her fear that it would be difficult to go through with it. Why was he so changed? Was she as much so? She must endeavour not to show it, if she were;—she must be brave,—it would soon be over; and after the first all would be easy. Ah! there was the waltz ended. Would he come at once? This suspense was hard to bear.

At last the faint jingle of spurs was heard; the well-known step crossed the room towards her, the well-known voice spoke to her, and the words were nearly the same he was accustomed to make use of when asking her to join that

dance; and yet the difference, slight as it was, made her feel the width of the gulf between them.

"They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

Formerly it used to be, "This is our dance, Ellen." Now it was simply, "This, I think, is our dance." How near the words were, but how widely the difference of the feelings with which they were heard and uttered!

She rose mechanically,—she took his offered arm; and, as if walking in a dream, they took the place in the dance they were accustomed to take; but neither spoke a word, till he said, "You used to like to be near the door; but they tell me you have been ill; perhaps it is too cold for you here."

"Not at all—the air is pleasant."

"Have you really been ill?" he repeated.

"Only a bad cold; it is nearly gone now. I have been subject to them since my accident; and," she added with a smile, "they are provokingly weakening. You must not be annoyed if I cannot go down the whole dance as I used to do."

He turned his eyes full upon her as she spoke. It was difficult for her at any time to meet those large dark orbs and not feel their influence; and now, when the long lashes were raised, and that glance that Ellen felt could read her very soul fell upon her, hers fell beneath them; her colour came and went, and she felt the hand that lay on his arm tremble; but she forced herself to show no other sign of emotion, and at last he said—

"You do not look ill,—indeed, I have seldom seen you look better; but you must not over-exert your strength to dance with me. Believe me, I should like as well if you would let me take you to that quiet ottoman. I wish to speak to you."

"Oh, no!" she answered nervously; "I can get through this dance perfectly. I had rather try it—indeed I would."

He made no further effort to persuade her, but said, abruptly, "Have you been riding much lately?"

"Not very much ; I have been driving more of late."

"The pony carriage?"—and a slight smile crossed his face.

"Why are the Mannerses not here to-night?"

"Lady Agnes's brother is lately dead."

"And Hazlewood's uncle also, I understand ; so he is now an honourable ? It will not make much difference there" (with the very faintest turn of his head towards Judith Dashwood) ; "but in some quarters it will. I hear the Wintertons are going abroad. All the neighbourhood seems changed since I left it two months ago."

"Two months often make great changes," she replied, as if thinking aloud, rather than addressing him.

"Ay, that they do. Would to heaven the last two could be effaced from my life ! When will you listen to what I have to tell you ?" he said, suddenly ;—"I must speak to you some time—I must tell you all."

At this moment the gay music of the country dance struck up. Harry Dashwood and Mrs. Stanhope led the figure ; and Ellen drew back into her place and said, "I cannot tell."

"Try to arrange it," he contrived to whisper, when they were once again thrown together.

"No," she answered, decidedly, "I cannot—I do not wish to do so."

The look he gave her as she said this she never forgot ; but no one save herself knew what had passed between them. Her steadfast resolution not to give him the opportunity he sought, enabled her to go through the dance. At its close Colonel Wyndham came to take her to supper. She felt utterly exhausted ; but that too she went through bravely. At its close her father came up to her, told her she looked sadly fagged, and advised her return home immediately. Their carriage was not come ; but Sir Francis Vere's was, and of course was at their service ; so Mrs. Egerton remained behind, and Ellen and her father quitted Chevely together.

"My child, you are not so strong as you would have us suppose. I shall not allow you to go to any more of these stupid balls."

"They are rather fatiguing," she replied, languidly ; and then she sunk back on the cushions, and was conscious of

nothing more till she found herself in her own room at home, with her father sitting by her, and Dr. Hunt leaning over her, with his watch in his hand and his fingers on her wrist.

"All right now, Miss Egerton," he said, in his rough, cheery voice; "but we must not overstrain our nervous energies as we have been doing lately; we must keep quiet, and lead a stay-at-home, rational life. Now good night. I have given Mrs. Martha a composing-draught for you. A good sleep will do wonders for you."

Sleep! Could she sleep, when her heart was so torn, her feelings so strangely agitated with compassion for him, for herself, and for that fair, spiritual-looking bride? How came things to be as they were? Was she right to have refused his explanation? She intended to do her duty,—she intended to avoid all that might rouse in her heart a deeper interest in his fate than she already had; but that reproachful and yet piteous look when she refused his request, haunted her. Would to God she could forget it! Would they had never met! Oh, no—not that! What had life been without him?—what would it be now?

And then the dulling effects of the opiate stole over her, and she fell into that heavy, restless sleep that one fears almost more than desires; "for in that sleep what dreams may come?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

TERESE'S FIRST VISIT.

"How did it end?"

And was not this enough?

They met—they parted."

P. B. SHELLEY.

A WEEK elapsed before Ellen was permitted to leave her chamber, and during that time the first visits between the Egertons and Stanhopes were exchanged.

There are seasons when illness is a blessing; and in this light Ellen considered her present indisposition, for it saved

her from the Christmas gaieties of the neighbourhood, in all of which the new-married couple took part. But her step-mother was both annoyed and angry at the inopportune interruption to all social meetings at the Park, and fretted her husband by constant animadversions on Ellen's readiness to yield to the slightest feeling of illness. "If Ellen had my nerves, it would be different; but a young, strong girl like her to give way is too absurd! Besides, people talk so about it; say she looked in perfect health at the Dashwoods' ball, and that suddenly, after her meeting the Stanhopes, she had taken ill. And then Reginald chooses to look wretched, and his silly little wife unhappy; and so people gossip, the more so that Egerton Park is the only place to which the bride and bridegroom have not been invited! Such a change from the time when Reginald—Captain Stanhope, I mean—was here morning, noon, and night."

At first Mr. Egerton listened in contemptuous silence; but by-and-by the constant repetition of the same story worried him. He began to think it was odd that Reginald did not drop in of a morning as he used to do; that when he spoke of Ellen, his inquiries about her were made with the utmost formality; and that it was a curious coincidence that her illness had taken place after meeting him for the first time.

He was satisfied that there was no truth in the report that Stanhope's marriage had come on Ellen by surprise. Frank Vere assured him that both she and he himself were aware of Reginald's engagement before he went to Ireland. Still it made his blood boil to have his wife hint that this was not believed in Heddlesham, but that people said that his daughter—his beloved Julia's child—had given her affections unsought, and was now suffering the penalty of having them rejected and despised. The very idea that such a thing could be believed set him nearly wild; and yet how could it be contradicted or disproved! He cursed his own imprudence in allowing an intimacy which had ended so disastrously, and he almost hated Reginald for being the cause, however innocently, of so much annoyance. Nevertheless Mrs. Egerton's advice was not altogether to be despised in such circumstances. She said that all that could be now done was to pay the Stanhopes especial

attention, and if possible to encourage an intimacy between Ellen and Reginald's wife ; if only it would not be disagreeable to Ellen !

Ay, that was a consideration ; and for the second time the idea occurred to him,—Can the story be true ? And the dread that it might be haunted him so constantly, that he felt he must find out from Ellen herself whether it were or no.

The evening on which he resolved to come to an explanation with her was the first on which she had been allowed to come downstairs. She had been carried to her boudoir, where Kate, before going with her mother to a Twelfth-night party, had been permitted to pour out Ellen's tea, and make her quite comfortable before leaving her alone. How pretty the little room looked, with its shaded lamp, its rich hangings, and clear-burning fire ! everything told of luxury as well as comfort ; yet when the door closed behind her bright little sister, Ellen's heart sank within her. Her exertions to look cheerful had exhausted her, and the recollections connected with that particular room thronged upon her one by one. It was on this very spot that Reginald had caught her to his mailed breast. Ah ! she had resolved not to think of that now ; but how could she forget it when every day they told her how wretched he looked ; how strange his manner was to his wife ; how even strangers remarked that it was no happy marriage. If she could but believe he cared for his wife, she would be satisfied, but——

Her father's entrance broke off this unwholesome reverie.

"I am come to spend half an hour with you, love," he said, as he drew a chair close to her sofa ; "it is a long time, my Ellen, since we have had a comfortable talk together."

"A long time indeed, papa."

There was a moment's silence ; it was broken by Mr. Egerton's repetition of some *bon mot* of little Kate's ; and having started a subject, though a trivial one, he went on flowingly. When he chose to exert his conversational talents, no man could manage them better than Mr. Egerton, and he soon contrived, without his daughter perceiving his drift, to draw her into a confidential chat on old times ; to get her to describe to him more minutely than she had ever yet done how she and Reginald were thrown together in

childhood, and how natural it seemed to her to return to their old habits of intimacy when meeting again after a five years' separation.

"It seemed like a return to Penmorfa," Ellen said, with bright beaming eyes, "only so much more delightful."

"You are very fond of Penmorfa, are you not?" he said, after a long pause.

"Very fond of it."

"I wish *I* could return thither," he added, with a slight tremor in his voice. "I have never been but once since a great sorrow befell me there, a sorrow too deep for me even yet to contemplate it calmly. Did you ever hear your grandmother speak of that fatal accident, Ellen?"

"Never!"

"That was kind and good of her. She did not wish to prejudice you against me."

"That she could not do, papa, if she would," said Ellen eagerly; "but indeed, indeed she loves you very dearly."

"I believe she does, Ellen; and yet she did not wish to intrust her daughter's happiness to my care. It was natural enough. There was another who loved her, if not better, at least more unselfishly than I did. He—he died at Penmorfa; I may perhaps tell you how some day." I cannot now. But that is why I cannot revisit the place. Even on the day of my marriage I was there scarce half an hour, and only went because Mrs. Floyd insisted that I should. It was this, Ellen, and no indifference to you, my child, which made us so long strangers to each other; this, and my conviction that Egerton Park was no such home for my darling as she could find at Penmorfa."

"It was a pleasant home," Ellen said, and then was silent.

"Should you like to return there for a time?"

"Oh, so much!" and a vivid colour lighted up her face at the thought that if she went there she should escape all present trials, fears, and anxieties. But alas!—and the evanescent flush faded from her cheek—she might thus risk an eternal separation from him in whom still she felt so intense, so absorbing an interest. In a few weeks or months at most the 20th expected to be ordered on foreign service; and the thought of never seeing him again was agony.

Mr. Egerton watched her changing countenance with anxiety. "You really would like to leave Egerton Park, Ellen?"

"For a time I should," she said, with a quivering lip; "I am quite unfit at present for—for—the claims society has on one here."

"I entirely agree with you; but I fear lest Penmorfa should seem very lonely to you, after your late happy life here. It has been a happy life, has it not, Ellen?"—and he fixed his penetrating eyes on her face.

"Very happy," she gasped rather than answered.

"And yet you have not looked of late as if it were so, my child."

"Have I not? I tried to do so, but I am so weak."

"Ellen, dearest, answer me one question. Has this illness of yours any mental cause? Were you quite candid with me when you wrote to me that you were aware of Reginald Stanhope's engagement?"

She cast a terrified look at him,—she saw he was watching her,—and for Reginald's sake she bore his scrutiny without flinching, as she answered,—“He told me of it some weeks before he went to Ireland,—not the names, but the facts; the names he told me the day he went.”

Mr. Egerton seemed only half satisfied by her explanation, but before he could question her further, Martha appeared to remind Miss Ellen that Dr. Hunt particularly wished her to be in bed before ten.

The welcome interruption relieved her from further discussion; but the narrow escape she had made, taught her how careful she must be in so conducting herself to both Reginald and his wife as to put her father's half-roused suspicions to sleep. It would not be a very long ordeal she should have to undergo. She should soon be at Penmorfa again, and there she would be at peace. And then she sighed, and tried to rejoice that it was decided that she was to go.

Before she fell asleep Kate came to give her an account of her evening's amusement. The Stanhopes had been there—had both spoken of her—both expressed a strong desire to see her as soon as she was able to receive visitors, and Mrs. Egerton had promised that they should be the first persons admitted on her recovery.

"I must see more of Mrs. Stanhope, Ellen," Kate said, again and again. "She is very like Reginald's sketch of her, and yet different ; those eyes of hers are so odd, they haunt me. Do you remember Fred Foljambe saying she was like a dead person ? I could not help thinking of it, and then I began to remember these words you used to sing :—

'Oh, ye dead ! oh, ye dead !
Whom we know by the light you give
From your cold gleaming eyes,
Though you move like men that live.'

Whenever I looked at her, those lines came into my head ; and yet when she asked me to go and see her, I said I would ; so mamma promised to take me to-morrow. She is to stay at home to meet us. I half think I like her, though she is odd. Dr. Hunt was talking a great deal to her, and Mr. Spencer. I don't think Reginald half likes Mr. Spencer, Ellen. But, by the bye, Dr. Hunt is to see you to-morrow at noon, he bade me tell you. To-morrow ! why it is two o'clock now !—to-day then ; and don't tell him I came to see you before I went to bed."

Mrs. Egerton was ready to waylay Dr. Hunt next day, to extort from him permission to name an early day to have the Stauhopes to dine with them. They had been so remiss hitherto, and Ellen was so much better, and fretted so not to have her old friend and his bride, that the good, kind doctor must give in.

The good, kind doctor hummed and hawed a good deal. He had rather she had no excitement at all ; still, if the party were very, very small, and Miss Egerton made no exertion, why perhaps in a fortnight hence he might think of it.

"A fortnight !" exclaimed Mrs. Egerton, "and you threaten to send Ellen to Wales in a month."

"Well, well ; we shall see about it ; we must not be too hasty. I let her off too easily last time,—was not half strict enough ; and you see what came of it. Balls, dinners, archery meetings, and what not ; and that within a week or two of being well-nigh burned to death, and afterwards pulled down by nervous fever. Even a Hercules must lose some vital energy under such suffering, and if overtasked too

soon, would suffer in consequence. It can't be helped,—it is a rule of Dame Nature's, who always revenges herself if her rules are neglected. By my sooth, these burns have left little outward mark," he added, as he bared the once fair, round arm. "Rather thin, to be sure, but as white as Miss Kate's; not a scar visible. He is a queer fellow that Stanhope to teach an old hand like me such a wrinkle."

"Is not his wife a beauty, Dr. Hunt?" asked Mrs. Egerton with *emprêsement*.

"Yes, yes; I dare say she is—a pretty woman, certainly; but—well, well, that is neither here nor there; she is pretty, very pretty; but thank God she is not my wife!"

Ellen's pulse gave a quick, sudden throb beneath the doctor's fingers at this speech. He did not seem to remark it, but went on,—“She is too like a spirit for my taste, that is the fact. I go with the poet, and admire ‘a being not too——’ I forget what; but it ends something about ‘human nature's daily food.’ Now, to my mind, the bonnie bride is a little like the lady in the ‘Arabian Nights,’ who eat her rice with a bodkin.”

“What!” exclaimed Kate, “do you think Reginald's wife is a ghoul?”

The doctor laughed heartily. “No, no, Miss Kate, not that; only she does not seem fit for human nature's daily food, that's all; and yet,” he added, more seriously, “it is *not* all. Our profession leads us to understand the mind as well as the body; and it seems to me as if that poor thing had gone through more than is good for either one or other; and though she may not be a ghoul in the sense in which we read it in the Eastern tales, she is so spiritually. I mean” (seeing Kate's horror-stricken face)—“I mean that, when alone, she digs up the buried past, and feeds on it, instead of making use of the present, which God has given us all to use and to enjoy. Believe me, my child” (and he laid his hand kindly on Kate's head), “there is no greater evil to an imaginative temperament than to let the present be devoured by the past:—‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ But how many make it bear not only its own burden, but that which is gone before, as well as that which *may* come. ‘Look not mournfully to the past,—it cometh not back again; wisely improve the present,—it is thine. Go

forth to meet the shadowy future without fear, and with a manly heart.' There is much that is useful in these few words," he added as, heartily shaking Ellen's hand and bidding her be of good cheer, he left her.

"What a funny old man he is!" Kate said as he disappeared. Ellen was silent. Dr. Hunt's words struck her powerfully "Ah," she thought, "he little imagines how much I require them." Luckily for her she did not know how much he knew—how much her quick-beating pulse had betrayed.

Kate returned from her call on Mrs. Stanhope brimful of gossip. She had received them very cordially, telling Kate she had heard so much of her and her sister, she seemed to know them already; adding, that she was selfishly sorry to hear of Miss Egerton's continued illness. She had looked forward to her acquaintance as her principal pleasure in Heddlesham. At Chevely she had had but a glimpse of her, but it had taught her that all she had heard of her did not do her justice. "Speaking of you in that way, Ellen, darling," Kate proceeded, "made me quite like her. At first, though, I did not. Her pale face, and her black hair and black eyes, did make her so like the ghoul that Dr. Hunt called her, I felt quite uncomfortable. But when she spoke of you,—when she said that you were so like an old friend of hers who was dead, and that that was one reason the more for wishing to see you again, I felt quite fond of her; for the large eyes filled with tears, and looked so soft and loving, I forgot all about the ghoul. I never before saw eyes fill as hers do, and yet without the tears overflowing the eyelids: they just well up, giving a moist, bright look to the eyes; and that is all."

"I think her eyes are like all other black eyes," Mrs. Egerton said; "I cannot understand people making a work about them."

"Oh no, mamma, they are not; they don't pierce through you as Miss Trevillian's do, or make you feel uncomfortable like Mr. Spencer's; but they are soft and gentle, like my little spaniel's—not at all like a bride's eyes."

Mrs. Egerton laughed, said she never heard of a child with such odd fancies as Kate; but if Mrs. Stanhope's eyes were not like a bride's, at least her dress was. "You have no

idea how pretty it was, Ellen,—a dove-coloured poplin trimmed with velvet of a darker shade, and the most beautifully embroidered collar and cuffs *en suite*; while the lace on her handkerchief was exquisite *point de Paris* of at least an inch and a half wide."

"Well," observed Kate, "I never saw how she was dressed; but I did see that she looked unhappy,—there is no doubt about that."

"She is quite a stranger here, Kate," said Ellen.

"Oh yes, I know all that; but that need not make her take to reading things like Byron's poems. She was reading them when we went in. I saw her pass her handkerchief across her eyes as she laid down her book; and so I took a peep to see what it was, and it was that one about Thyrsa and the moon. You know Harry has been reading Byron to me, so I am well up in it. Now, Ellen, do you think that was at all a poem for a bride to read?"

In other circumstances Ellen might only have been diverted by Kate's remarks; but, as it was, they pained her. Every one seemed struck by Mrs. Stanhope's look of unhappiness; it could not, therefore, be a mere idea of her own.

"I don't like unhappy people," said Mrs. Egerton, curtly. "At all events, there is no necessity for thrusting their unhappiness in one's way; but it seems the fashion in Heddlesham at present. Do you hear, Ellen, that Albina Winterton has given up her siege of Colonel Wyndham in despair, and goes abroad with Mrs. Brudenell? What will Heddlesham do without them, I wonder! However, I am glad of it on one account:—they will of course go to Paris;—Mrs. Brudenell must get a new dress gown there, and we shall see no more of that hideous green velvet, which has been the Mordecai at my gate for ten years past."

"Then Albina was in earnest?" Ellen asked with some interest.

"In earnest to get married," said Mrs. Egerton, satirically; "at least they declare that when she found the poor colonel so resolute, she had hopes of Lieutenant McLean; but Edith Attwood cut her out in that quarter. Oh, Ellen, you never saw anything so absurd as Edith looked to-day when we called. Her hair——"

But enough of Heddlesham news. Ellen cared very little for it when it no longer concerned the Stanhopes.

It was still early the next forenoon when Ellen, reclining on the sofa in the boudoir, was startled by the opening of the drawing-room door and the announcement of Captain and Mrs. Stanhope. The communication between the two rooms was open, and she could not help seeing and being seen by the visitors; so she rose at once, and advanced to meet them. Mrs. Stanhope hastened to prevent her, saying, with much earnestness, that they came at that untimely hour rather to inquire for than to intrude upon her, and begging her to resume her reclining attitude. Her eager tone, the look of interest, almost of affectionate solicitude, in her face, made Ellen yield at once. Indeed, she could with difficulty support herself, although she assured her visitors she felt almost well that morning, and quite able to talk to them.

Mrs. Stanhope shook her head doubtingly. "I fear we ought not to have been admitted."

Ellen smiled as she withdrew her hand from the cordial pressure of the bride's little fingers, saying at the same time, "I have no doubt the servants think that Captain Stanhope is exempt from common rules as regards the admission of visitors."

"Thank you," he said, as he took her offered hand and pressed it between both of his. The old familiar grasp closing over her fingers brought a rush of recollections with it that made her breath come thick and a mist steal over her eyes. She felt very faint, but the dread of making a scene just then enabled her to struggle against the threatened insensibility. One instant only she leaned back on the cushions with closed eyes, and then rousing herself to exertion, she tried to support some kind of conversation with her visitors, trusting that Mrs. Egerton would immediately come to her assistance.

It is, however, no easy matter in any circumstances to maintain a conversation with one of whose tastes, feelings, and habits you are entirely ignorant; and when, as in Ellen's case, ill-health is added, and worse than that, the conviction that there is one sitting by curiously marking all that passes, and able to compare the present constraint with the natural manner, it is indeed a trying ordeal.

Luckily for her, it did not continue long; for Mrs. Egerton soon entered, accompanied by Kate.

Mrs. Egerton was full of delight, apologies, explanations, and surprise;—so glad to see them at last at Egerton Park, so sorry to be out of the way, so unable to understand how they had gained admission to dear Ellen's sanctum, and so very, very much pleased that the mistake had been made, dear Ellen had so wished to see them.

Kate meanwhile had rushed up to Reginald, and with all a child's vivacity and heartiness had greeted him, laughed at and scolded him within five minutes, and by her unconscious influence the constraint that had hung over all was so much diminished, that when Mr. Egerton entered all looked much as it used to do, except for Mrs. Stanhope's presence, and Ellen's too evident exhaustion.

Luncheon being announced, Mr. Egerton, with old-fashioned courtesy, "carried" Mrs. Stanhope to the dining-room, while Mrs. Egerton, busied about many things, allowed Reginald one uninterrupted moment to whisper to Ellen an entreaty to see her soon, and alone.

"I cannot," she said, in a voice to which agitation gave a touch of asperity; "any, the slightest agitation is too much for me."

"What, then, shall I do—must I write, after all? I cannot live with this unexplained estrangement between us."

"There is none, I assure you;" and she again put out her hand to bid him adieu.

"Shall I not see you again?"

"Not to-day."

"To-morrow—next day?"

She shook her head. "Be satisfied, we are friends, as we have always been. Ask no more. Go; Mrs. Egerton calls you."

As he prepared to obey, he said in a low but concentrated voice, "That does not satisfy me;—I must, I will clear myself one day;"—and then he went.

She clasped her fingers tightly across her strained and weary eyeballs, and murmured, "Father, have mercy upon me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONFIDENCE OFFERED.

"I long to hear the story of your life, which must
Take the ear strangely."

SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. EGERTON's civilities to the Stanhopes did not end with inviting them to stay lunch;—she had resolved to patronize the bride, and she did so completely. She took her out to drive with her, introduced her to her own tradespeople, brought her frequently in an afternoon to spend an hour at the Park,—in short, "managed" so well, that everybody agreed that the stories they had heard against Captain Stanhope had no foundation except in Mr. Spencer's fertile imagination; and it was now readily acknowledged that Spencer could exaggerate, or invent a report,—especially an ill-natured one.

All this was very well in one respect; but it was so far hurtful to Ellen, that the chance of seeing him or his wife every day, and at any hour, kept her in a fever of expectation, which did not hasten her recovery. She feared, even while she desired their presence. She could not yet divest herself of a certain pleasurable sensation on seeing him, or hearing his voice. She carefully avoided any opportunity of being alone with him, or giving him the opportunity of offering the explanation he sought; but she watched his conduct to his wife, caught with eagerness at any expression of voice or manner which seemed to denote a growing interest in her, and endeavoured by every means in her power to draw her out in some way which would gratify him. But this was difficult. When alone at Egerton Park, Mrs. Stanhope was pleasant, easy to converse with, and sometimes even animated, although it was seldom that the melancholy expression passed from her countenance,—never, indeed, unless when chatting with Kate, into whose childish pursuits she entered with apparent pleasure. When Reginald was present, she was an altered being—*distract*, nervous, and

silent, only speaking when obliged to answer ; more intent on listening to her husband than anything else, and perpetually endeavouring to glean from those who knew him well some knowledge of his tastes and pursuits, of which she was as evidently ignorant as she was unwilling to confess her ignorance. On one occasion this was particularly remarkable. Ellen had been looking through her portfolio preparatory to leaving for Penmorfa, and while putting aside the sketches which she wished to carry with her, had found several which had been taken under Reginald's direction. Each brought the history of a day along with it. The first in the portfolio was an attempt she had made to sketch from memory the fine beech-tree at Penmorfa, so associated with their early companionship. While the drawing was in progress, each had conjured up a host of childish memories, which returned upon her now, as she looked at it : therefore she must leave it behind. The next was a slight sketch of the reach of the river near the "Ridings." They had gone there a large merry party soon after she returned from Vere Court, on her recovery from her fall with Patron. It was then, for the first time, that she had fancied that there was something in Reginald's manner towards her beyond that of mere common friendship. Then came the seat in the West Wood. Ah ! what sad remembrances were associated with it now ! She put it also aside. It was not wise, she felt, to take such mementoes to the home where she was to seek peace and forgetfulness. The next she turned to was the little collection Reginald had sent her on her birthday. These she must keep,—she could not part with them ; but she would seal them up, and put them in some cabinet at Penmorfa, where they could remain till the "dead past buried its dead." The few that had been drawn soon after her arrival at Egerton Park she might take with her. They, too, had their memories, but they were not hurtful ones ; and she laid each in its separate parcel, and was about to wrap them severally in paper, when the Stanhopes accompanied Mrs. Egerton into the room.

"We disturb you, I fear," Reginald said, in the formal manner which was daily growing upon him when addressing Ellen.

She assured him it was well that she had been dis-

turbed, as she had overfatigued herself by arranging her portfolios.

Without thinking what he did, Reginald drew that which contained the drawings towards him, and began to look them over. Ellen could not help watching him as he did so, nor did she fail to trace in his countenance the echo of her own feelings when so engaged. Mrs. Stanhope, as if attracted by the silence that followed, turned to see what occupied him, and Mrs. Egerton asked her "whether she was as fond of drawing as her husband was?"

Reginald closed the portfolio, crossed the room, and sat down by Kate.

"No," Mrs. Stanhope said, timidly; "that is, I do not know. I never had a pencil in my hand."

"We used to have constant sketching-parties here last year. Captain Stanhope was our best artist. What a talent he has for taking likenesses!"

"Has he!" she said with some interest; "has he ever taken your likeness?"—and she turned her large eyes full on Ellen.

"O yes, over and over again," said Mrs. Egerton, laughing; "he said Ellen sat so still it was very easy to take her."

"May I look at these?" Mrs. Stanhope continued, still addressing Ellen.

She blushed, but said, "Certainly; there are, however, only one or two of Captain Stanhope's sketches here; Kate has more of them than I have."

Mrs. Stanhope nervously turned over the drawings; she seemed to feel that her husband was watching her. At last she paused, and looked very earnestly at one of them; it was that in which Ellen was represented in her boudoir reading.

"It is very like—very beautiful!" she said. Then she placed her hand over part of it, so as to conceal the under-part of the face, and looked again and again, while tears welled up into her eyes, and her face assumed a look of mournful pleasure that was very touching. Ellen watched her with a curious kind of interest. It was evident that it was not as *her* portrait that the sketch interested her. What could be the reading of this strange riddle?

Mrs. Egerton looked over her shoulder to see what had caught her fancy. "Ah!" she said, "that was done at Hautonville, was it not, Captain Stanhope? I remember you sent it to Ellen on her birthday—that dreadful day. Dear Ellen has never been well since that sad accident."

Mrs. Stanhope roused herself from her abstraction at these words, and began again to turn over the leaves.

"That," continued Mrs. Egerton, "is a sketch of Ellen's—Castle Desmond. I don't think you visit the Desmonds, do you? But Captain Stanhope knows them. You have heard, have you not, of Julia Desmond's engagement? It is settled at last,—it has been hanging off and on for years. I remember telling Ellen, when we were at Hautonville, that I was sure it was to be. She could not see it; but I don't wonder, her mind was then a good deal engrossed by another engagement in which we were all interested;" and she looked meaningly at Reginald.

"I hope it is a good match," he answered, mechanically.

"Yes, very good; at least when we remember that she has no fortune. The best of it, however, is, that there are to be no more tiresome delays. I detest long engagements, they always turn out ill."

Mrs. Stanhope grew deadly pale, and, shutting the portfolio before her, thrust it away. Mrs. Egerton felt she had made a *gauche* remark, and to mend it said quickly, "I fear we have bored you with Ellen's drawings."

"O no—indeed no. I like them so much; but I am no judge; I do not draw myself—I wish I did. At least," she murmured, in a voice that only reached Ellen's ear, "I wish I could draw faces;" and, so saying, she opened the other portfolio.

"That is only music," Ellen said.

"Only music! Dear Miss Egerton, do you not like music? I thought you did. They told me you sang so well, and I have so longed to hear you; I am so passionately fond of music."

"I seldom sing now," Ellen answered.

"But you will some day to me, will you not? I do so earnestly desire to hear your voice," she whispered, taking Ellen's hand in both of hers; "will you promise me?"

The pleading look of those large eyes was irresistible. "When I am a little stronger I will try."

"Thank you very much. I used to live on music—I loved it with all my heart and soul—and even yet I love it, though now, alas! it often brings as much pain as pleasure!"

"You are yourself a musician?"

"No; I sing, or used to do so; but really to enjoy music one must listen! Oh, it is so delicious to drink in the sweet melodious sounds,—to be carried out of oneself,—to forget earth, and care, and sorrow!—" Then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, she cast a startled look towards her husband, as if to see whether he had overheard her, and added, in a still lower whisper, "You must think me very odd, Miss Egerton, and I ought to remember that I am a stranger to you, though I cannot feel that you are a stranger to me."

"Your husband sings beautifully," Ellen said, with difficulty; for the strange, excited manner of the young wife made her feel sad and puzzled.

"I have not heard him since I was a girl; he tells me he never sings now."

At that same instant Mrs. Egerton was saying, "I hope Captain Stanhope has not really made a vow against music. I used to delight to hear his and Ellen's voices together." Though the question was addressed directly to herself, Mrs. Stanhope seemed resolved that her husband should answer it; for she was silent till Reginald said, with a slight laugh, "I have made no *vow* about it, but I must begin to be a busy man once more, and give up the follies of my bachelor days."

"Music is no folly," Mrs. Egerton said; while both Ellen and Mrs. Stanhope looked at him inquiringly.

"I mean," he said, in some confusion, "that—in short, I fear if Mrs. Stanhope hears that I used to be considered a tolerable second, she may wish—" he stopped.

His wife answered quickly, "Do not imagine that I could ever expect you to sing with me; my songs are far too simple to require, or indeed allow of, any accompaniment; so do not let the dread of my importunities prevent you from singing."

He looked annoyed, and answered, gravely, "You mistake me completely. I only meant that music is so fascinating a pursuit that I believe I ought to relinquish it entirely, otherwise I may not indulge it in moderation. Indeed, moderation in anything is difficult to me. My visits here, for example, are neither moderate in number or length. Do you know, Mrs. Stanhope, that we have been here nearly an hour?"

She grew very red, and started to her feet in an instant. "I believe Captain Stanhope is right; we do intrude too much on your leisure, Mrs. Egerton. Pray forgive my selfishness,—I shall endeavour to cure myself of it;" and the ready tears rose to her eyes.

"Indeed you shall do no such thing. *You* must come to us," Kate exclaimed, "whether Reginald does or no. None of us can live without excitement;" and the child spoke with so absurd an air of *ennui*, that both husband and wife smiled, and on Mrs. Egerton seconding what she had said, promised to return frequently.

"Do you also wish it?" Reginald asked Ellen, as he bade her good-bye.

"I do wish to become better acquainted with your wife," she answered in the same low tone. She did not look at him as she said this; for though she wished him to understand that she would rather that his wife came alone, yet she knew that it would pain him to be told so.

Whatever he felt, he obeyed her. From that time Mrs. Stanhope's visits were made unaccompanied by her husband. It was right, it was wise of him to yield at once to her wishes, and it gratified Ellen to find that she had still such influence over him; but sometimes she regretted that his obedience was so complete. However, it enabled her to follow out more easily the object she had so much at heart,—that of helping Terese more fully to appreciate her husband.

From some unknown reason Mrs. Stanhope seemed to have taken a fancy to her; and if she could but win her confidence, she felt certain that she could, without showing what she wished to do, instil into the young wife's mind some idea of the peculiarities as well as the good qualities of her husband; and if she could effect this, she felt that she herself had neither suffered nor lived in vain. In this Ellen was a true

woman, eager, at any sacrifice of her own feelings, to insure the happiness of him who had been the idol of her imagination.

But Reginald's absence was not all that was necessary to enable her to do as she wished. To effect what she desired, she must be quite alone with Mrs. Stanhope; but somehow or other she never saw her save in Mrs. Egerton's presence. A trifle relieved her from this fresh difficulty.

Since her illness Dr. Hunt had repeatedly urged her to resume her drives in the pony-carriage instead of the chariot, and had more than once suggested that Sir Francis Vere or Kate should drive her, until she were herself strong enough to take the reins. Kate, who, with all her ready-wittedness and want of shyness in most things, was physically timid, resolutely refused the responsibility. Ellen, for her own reasons, avoided any application to Sir Francis; and Dr. Hunt, finding his orders neglected, got annoyed, and almost angry, threatened to act charioteer himself, and then, turning to Mrs. Stanhope, who was present, said crossly, "Now, Mrs. Stanhope, don't you agree with me that it is a very hard thing that when a doctor gives any order that it is easy to execute, it is overlooked; but if it is difficult, it is complied with at once? People will swallow whole gallons of detestable medicine most religiously, but if you order a few mouthfuls of fresh air,—pah! nobody minds you. The idea of no one, man or woman, to be had to drive Ellen Egerton in her pony-carriage is too ridiculous! If I were a young man, and had the time to bestow, I'd do it myself to shame all the idle fellows in the county."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Stanhope earnestly, "nothing would give Captain Stanhope more pleasure than to offer his services."

"Tut, tut, tut! Captain Stanhope *was* of use once, but he has returned to his fusty old books, they tell me; and I could never trust a bookworm with such a responsibility."

"Could you trust me, doctor?" she asked with a blush; "I am an Irishwoman, accustomed to horses from my infancy, no bookworm, and—and—" she hesitated—"fully aware of the value of the treasure intrusted to my care."

Dr. Hunt looked at her in surprise, then quietly walking up to her, took hold of her little hand, examined the tiny

fingers, the small wrist, and said with a smile, "There is power in them nevertheless, so I will trust her with you."

She smiled,—a strange smile it was, playing like moonshine on snow, bright, but not warm,—and said a little sadly, "Time was when I was a noted horsewoman, and I have not quite forgot my skill, though I have no practice now."

"Do you not ride with Reginald?" asked Kate bluntly.

"I have no horse, love. We are not rich."

"Oh, you should ride Ellen's; he wants work. Would it not do Selim good, Ellen?"

"He is quite at your service," she said cordially. "Captain Stanhope knows him well, and will trust you to ride him."

"Thank you very much, but I—in short, Captain Stanhope is so busy I could not make up my mind to ask him to ride with me. I—I had rather drive you if I may."

"I shall be very grateful."

"Then may I come to-morrow?"

"I shall send the carriage for you."

"Thank you; that will be charming;" and for a moment her whole face brightened—her very eyes laughed with pleasure.

When she left the room, Dr. Hunt said, "I like this arrangement, Miss Egerton; but, mind you, no ghoul-work between you."

Ellen blushed. Was it for the sake of the past or the future, she asked herself, that she had agreed to the proposal so readily? She could not tell; but it was done, and it was her duty now to make the best of it.

Nor was it long before the confidence which she sought was afforded her. The very first drive she took with Mrs. Stanhope brought forth a great deal more of the latter's private feelings than she had ever expected to learn. The first few sentences exchanged between them indeed were common-place enough, touching merely on the unusual beauty of the season, the rarity of having in January weather sufficiently genial to find an open carriage agreeable; and from thence they only diverged to the topics then current in the neighbourhood. But at last, allusion was made to Albina Winterton's disappointment in Colonel Wyndham. Ellen expressed sorrow for her, saying that, whether well or ill-

founded, her hopes were equally blighted, and the result equally painful and mortifying.

"Mortifying, I grant," said Mrs. Stanhope with a slight smile; "but I am rather a sceptic as to the pain a flirt suffers from a disappointment. A heart like Miss Winterton's takes a great deal to break it."

"Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent;
Hearts are not flint, and flints are rent"—

quoted Ellen.

"That is true, but not in the present instance, I am certain. From all I have heard, Colonel Wyndham's taste lies in a quite contrary direction; but they allege that the lady——" She stopped, and looked meaningly at Ellen.

"The lady?" Ellen repeated, questioningly.

"Of course you never heard who was the real object of his admiration?"

"No, indeed. I do not hear many of the *on-dits* of Heddlesham."

"I do, unluckily. I have heard a very great deal of Colonel Wyndham, Mr. Spencer, Sir Edmund Manners—all worshipping the same cold star."

Ellen looked at her wonderingly, and then, without weighing the possible interpretation of her words, said, "I am very glad to hear that Sir Edmund has a new object of attraction."

Mrs. Stanhope laughed. "Dear Miss Egerton, are you very deep, or very simple?"

Ellen changed colour at this strange speech, and said, hastily, "I do not understand your question."

"No, I see you do not. I see you really and truly are as young and fresh as they told me you were; and I beg your pardon for speaking as I have done."

A light flashed on Ellen's mind at this answer, and she earnestly begged her to explain herself. She should like to know really what she meant.

"You will not be angry with me if I do speak frankly?"

"On the contrary, I shall be obliged to you."

"Well, they told me, when I came here first, that Mrs. Egerton was resolved that you should marry during your first season, that she was disappointed by your refusal of Sir Edmund Manners, but consoled herself with the pre-

tensions Colonel Wyndham and Mr. Spencer made to your hand. You, however, were alike unconscious of and ungrateful for their devotion ; in short, your heart was either as cold as ice, or already bestowed."

"On whom?" Ellen said, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes.

"Nay, that is not a fair question."

"It is. I must know."

"Sir Francis Vere."

How selfish Ellen felt it to rejoice at this answer ; but the strong compression of her heart was relieved by it, and she said, gravely, "The reports are all equally unfounded. Sir Francis Vere and I are true friends, but that is all. He is forty—I am eighteen. Is that not a sufficient answer?"

"For Colonel Wyndham, yes ; for Sir Francis Vere, no—at least, from all I have ever heard. But a truce to this subject ; it is one I should never have dared to allude to, had I not imagined, from what Mrs. Egerton told me, that you were quite aware that it was talked of."

"I was not aware of it," Ellen said, gravely. "Mrs. Egerton and I do not think alike on such subjects."

"And I have pained you by my foolish gossip? Believe me, it was unwittingly done. I was drawn into it I know not how ; for these are matters on which I seldom touch. To me the feelings of the heart seem far too sacred to be made the theme of common conversation ;" and she sighed heavily.

"You are right. The more we feel, the less we are inclined to display our feelings."

"I agree with you, in most cases ; and yet there are one or two persons in the world to whom we seem drawn by a strange uncontrollable sympathy to confide our inmost thoughts—the most sacred as well as the most secret emotions of our hearts. Have you not felt it so, Miss Egerton?"

"I do not know—perhaps——" Ellen answered hesitatingly.

"I have once or twice in my life, but not often. I had a friend once, a very dear friend, named Madeline, who was my second self. She knew every thought of my heart, every joy, every sorrow of my life. When I lost her—and—— Well, what does that matter to you? I did not

mean to speak of that. I meant to tell you that you remind me of her so much that (do not think me very strange, very impertinent, dear Miss Egerton) I feel inclined to open my whole heart to you as I could have done to her."

Ellen trembled; she had desired the young wife's confidence; yet, when it was offered her in this unexpected fashion, she knew not how she should endure to hear the truth. Had she strength to listen to *all* she might desire to tell her? Yet how could she refuse the petition urged so timidly, and in a voice so low and touching?—how resist the pleading look of those soft, wistful eyes? She must accept the offer; but, while she had hesitated, Mrs. Stanhope's quick perceptions had seen her momentary reluctance, and, with a changed expression and altered voice, she said, "Forgive me: I know I have no title to thrust my private feelings upon you; I am so entirely a stranger to you, with no claims save—save that of your early intimacy with my husband. It was because of that I spoke as I have done—because I thought that you could and would tell me how I could best please him—how make myself more worthy than I am of his love; I mean, of his—in short, of being his chosen wife."

There was much in this broken sentence that touched Ellen's generous feelings; and she answered, cordially, "That is a very great claim upon me, and what I can do I will."

"Thank you very much—how much I cannot express. You have made me very happy—as happy as anything on earth can do. I fear I never again can be bright and youthful in my feelings; the spring of life was broken long ago; but if I can but add to his happiness, I shall not have lived in vain."

How strange it was to hear one who, in Ellen's opinion, held the whole happiness of the world in her keeping speak in so mournful a fashion. She forced herself, however, to utter some commonplace allusion to the newness of her position as Reginald's wife, her estrangement from her old home, which must make her feel for a time unlike herself.

"Estrangement from my old home!—unlike myself!

Dear Miss Egerton, if there were anything in this world I could have desired, it would have been, it was, to fulfil these my two great aims in life. If you knew what my *home* was, if you knew what my life has been, you would understand me—would know how grateful I am to God and to Captain Stanhope for placing me in the position in which I now am, and how earnest my desire is to show the depth of my gratitude. Have you any wish to hear my story? May I tell it you? May I show you what woman may go through and live?"

"I should like to know it," she replied, insensibly interested by the strange, wild fervour of her manner, and feverishly anxious to solve the riddle of Reginald's conduct to herself.

"Ah, when you look so, I feel I can tell you every thought of my heart! Those eyes, so like to those of my dear lost friend, tempt me to call you by her loved name—my Madeline, my darling, darling Madeline! When I first saw you at Chevely, you were dancing with young Fred Foljambe; and the brilliancy of your countenance, the smile on your lips, the sparkle in your eye, made me go back six long years, when I used to see her as gay, as bright, as life-like as you. But towards the end of the evening, when you were talking to Sir Francis Vere, I suppose you had been speaking of something sad, for then you were more like Sidney than Madeline; and—and that did not make me care the less for you. But I must not enter on this to-day. On our next drive I shall tell you all, if you will drive with me again; or may I come to you some morning, in your boudoir? I think, perhaps, it would be easier to tell you there than when—— Steady, Lilla—steady, Flo! Surely you know the sounds of a military band," she added, suddenly addressing the ponies. "Ah, there is the regiment! I did not think we should meet it here." She drew up the carriage to the side of the road; the little groom, who always attended Ellen, was in an instant at the ponies' heads; and the regiment rode by. Several of the officers—Reginald among the rest—recognized and saluted the carriage. He looked surprised as he discovered who were its occupants; and Mrs. Stanhope whispered, "I never thought of telling him where I was going to-day. I am almost glad

I did not. He looked as if it interested him—as if he cares to see me with you.”

Ellen did not answer. “Did he care? Did he wish it? She could not tell, she seemed to comprehend him less every day; or perhaps it was only that the tension of her own thoughts made her less able to see and understand things as they were. She returned home utterly exhausted by her drive, and yet unable to regret that she had yielded to Mrs. Stanhope’s wishes.

Mrs. Egerton met them on their return, and told Mrs. Stanhope that she hoped they were not engaged the next day, as she particularly wished them to dine at the Park.

Mrs. Stanhope hesitated, blushed, but could not give any answer. She really did not know Captain Stanhope’s engagements, but she should like to come if they could; and then she rose hastily to take leave, whispering to Ellen, as she bade her good bye,—“Do let me drive you to-morrow, I have so much to say.”

Ellen felt inclined to refuse, conscious that the exertion would unfit her for the fatigues of the evening. But then she remembered that she would gladly be spared appearing at dinner, and that the excuse of overfatigue in driving might enable her to do so. Ah! what a manœuvrer she was becoming! And yet she said she would be delighted to drive with Mrs. Stanhope!

CHAPTER XXV

TERESE'S STORY.

“There’s no art
To find the mind’s construction in the face,
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“My dear Miss Egerton,” Mrs. Stanhope began when they were again alone in the pony-carriage, “I have been thinking, since I saw you last, that you must fancy me the very strangest person in the world, to have forced my confidence

upon you as I have done. It can signify little to you what was my early history. All you can care for now is to know whether or no I can make your old friend happy."

"That was my principal wish before I knew you," Ellen answered; "but now I confess that I should like to know you for yourself; and perhaps," she added with a smile, "the one knowledge will assist the other. If I can learn what you have been, I may the more easily see what you will be."

A spasm as of pain passed across Mrs. Stanhope's face. "Alas! Miss Egerton, I have been nothing to any one but a burden for many a long day. I pray you, do not judge me from what I am about to tell you. It is sympathy and help I seek. I do so want a friend."

"You have your husband," was on Ellen's lips; but she remembered what Mary Beaumont had been to herself—how she had never reproached her with her want of confidence in those who seemed her natural protectors, and she said instead,—“We all feel sometimes that a faithful friend is God's best gift."

"Thank you, dear Miss Egerton: that kind speech comforts me, and now I will tell you all my short, sad story. I was left an orphan at an early age. My mother had married a poor man, and against the wishes of her friends; so that my aunt, Mrs. Markham, was considered very generous when she took me under her roof. The few hundreds left me by my parents were sufficient to clothe and educate me; but my aunt's intimates were not aware that I had even this; they all supposed I was indebted to Mrs. Markham for everything, little wotting that all I received from her was the shelter of her roof—no love, no sympathy, none of the motherly kindness which she promised to bestow on me when my own dear mother died. Her house was then, as now, the resort of the idle and the gay. Her time was fully occupied by her many duties and pleasures, and I was naturally looked upon as an intruder and a burden. Till I was six years old I was left entirely to the care of servants. By that time I was considered old enough to go to school, where I remained till I was sixteen. Naturally of a shy and timid disposition, the first year or two of my school life were wretched. My companions thought me dull,—my teachers considered me a dunce. I had no holidays, travelling was so expensive; and

I should have moped to death—for I was growing daily thinner and more dispirited—had not Madeline Gascoigne come to my rescue. Two years older than myself, and in every other respect my superior, she no sooner arrived at school than she took compassion on the poor friendless orphan, and changed the whole course of my life. She assisted me in my tasks, roused my emulation and forced me to partake of her sports; and thus I became an altered creature. When the holidays arrived, I no longer envied my young companions, for I was to return with Madeline to Kiloola. There all my future vacations were spent, and there, indeed, I was happy. We were full of hope then; the world was a world of delight, and life one paradise of beauty. My dear Madeline was lovely as a dream. I can only describe her style of beauty by saying that she was very like you. She was not quite so tall perhaps, and she was slighter than you are; but her eyes were of the same dark, beautiful blue; her features were as delicately chiselled, and her smile was like a sunbeam, lighting up everything on which it fell. It seemed in those days as if the cares of this world could never furrow the marble smoothness of her brow,—as if sorrow could never dim that laughing eye, or check the mirthful archness of her spirits. Alas! how often do countenances like hers bear in after-life the impress of misery. I have sometimes thought that those who are most formed to appreciate happiness, are those on whom suffering falls most heavily. Have you ever been struck by this fancy, Miss Egerton?"

"I have not considered the subject much," Ellen said, hesitatingly; "but I think it is very likely to be so. Their nerves are more delicately strung than those of commonplace people, and the chords that thrill most easily to joyful influences must be most susceptible to the touch of sorrow."

"True; or, as our own Moore expresses it,—

‘The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touch’d by the thorns.’

At all events, it was so with Madeline. She was the only daughter of her parents,—their pet, and that of her brother Sidney, whom you, Miss Egerton, resemble even more than you do Madeline. Yes," as she turned an earnest gaze on Ellen's

face, "even now I can almost persuade myself that it is his eyes I meet, his—— ah, do not look at me with that sad expression," she added, hastily turning away, "it is too like the last time we met, the last time we parted. Father!" she murmured, raising her wild eyes to heaven, "Father, forgive me—teach me to forget!"

There was a short silence. Ellen's emotion was too great for words; but Mrs. Stanhope saw that she understood and felt for her, and quickly recovering herself, went on,—

"Sidney was our constant companion; and who could know him as I did, could see him in his own family, worshipped, idolized, and yet so good, so gentle, so unspoilt, so considerate of others, so forgetful of himself,—so brilliant, generous, beautiful, and brave,—who could see all this and not love him? I did with my whole heart, and he loved me as only such a man could love. The last holidays I spent at Kiloola ended in our secret engagement—secret, at least, from my aunt, but known and approved by all his friends. We were too poor to marry then. The Gascoigne property was heavily embarrassed. Sidney had still his own way to make in the world; but he had good prospects, warm friends, and high courage; and when we are very young we hope.

"I returned to my aunt. The regiment of which Dr. Markham was surgeon was then stationed at Dublin; and knowing that the Gascoignes were to spend some part of that winter there, I was delighted to learn that my aunt had resolved to go thither also. She received me with tolerable kindness, for in those days I was a young, lively girl, and considered pretty. It is a long time ago,—I was only sixteen then, and happiness is a great beautifier; so people called me lovely, and my aunt was proud of me. Her own daughters were then mere children, and she liked to have some attraction to her house. You see, dear Miss Egerton, how frankly I speak to you; it seems to me now as if it were not my own story I was telling, but that of some other person.

"That was a happy winter. The world was new, and I was made much of by my aunt's friends. My uncle—who has always been kind to me—was very indulgent; and Madeline, Sidney, and I met constantly. Later in the year Sidney left us to join his regiment; but Madeline remained,

and then, when my own fate in life seemed fixed, I had time to think and wish that a future as happy as my own should open to my dear friend. It seemed as if my wishes were to be fulfilled. An acquaintance, formed soon after Sidney left Dublin, promised to bring her a like happiness with mine, and one more speedily secured. He was considerably older than Madeline, but very handsome and very agreeable,—nay, more than agreeable, he was absolutely fascinating;—his voice, his manner, his implied devotion, were irresistible. Who could doubt an affection so marked, so openly expressed? Even Mrs. Gascoigne's motherly penetration was misled by it. He was Madeline's superior in rank and fortune, but her family was more ancient than his; her position, therefore, was not greatly beneath him, and in everything else she was fitted to adorn a royal crown. There seemed nothing to prevent a happy ending of their romance. He never lost a single opportunity of being with her. If she stirred from home, he was aware of it, and at her side in the most unexpected places. She never seemed an instant absent from his thoughts. Each morning brought her a lovely bouquet from an anonymous but not unknown hand. Everything that the most enthusiastic lover could do to show his affection he did, except to pronounce those few magical words which are often but words of form. As for her, she adored him,—he was the only object of her thoughts; she trusted implicitly in his good faith, followed each implied wish of his, sang only the songs he loved, read only the books he admired. She seemed to see but with his eyes, hear but with his ears, and live upon his love. Alas, alas! what misery it is when the heart is enthralled, as hers was, when, worshipping the creature in place of the Creator, we forget all save the one beloved being whose image shuts out heaven and earth from our dazzled eyes. But so it was; and so long did her delusion continue, so long were his attentions bestowed on her only, that every one believed it was a settled thing, and that the marriage was to take place immediately. They envied her future rank and fortune; she only cared for *him*."

She paused. Ellen eagerly begged her to go on. "You interest me in her fate," she said; "I cannot believe it ended there."

"Alas! no. A change stole over him very gradually,

very imperceptibly ; but it did come. At first she would not see it. 'It was impossible,' she said, 'to expect that he should be always at her side.' But at last even she was forced to see it. She still frequented the scenes of former happiness, she still endeavoured to look gay as ever, to assume the light-heartedness that had once been her greatest charm ; but it would not do,—the iron had entered into her soul, and however brilliant she might be in society, at home and in her own chamber the reaction was dreadful. I never knew till then the meaning of the words 'hiding a broken heart beneath a smiling exterior.' She taught me how dreadful that meaning is.

"He, meanwhile—the fiend who had brought sorrow and death into our Paradise—he whose cold-blooded cruelty, whose false-heartedness, vanity, and treachery ought to have made him scouted by all, was still courted, flattered, and caressed as formerly. He was already devoting to another the fascinating attentions he had bestowed on her. Before Madeline's very face I have seen him do so, and when her beautiful eyes, heavy with unshed tears, would turn upon him pleadingly, as if to ask one look, one smile of recognition, the answer was but an increase of devotion to his new divinity. Ah, how often did I wish myself a man, that I might have had the luxury of calling out that wretch, and avenging my beloved friend. She, however, felt more sorrow than anger, 'she drooped like a lily beat down by the hail.'"

Mrs. Stanhope paused, her flushed cheek paled, her sparkling eye dimmed, and her excited voice grew calm and sorrowful as she resumed her sad story.

"What I could not do, Sidney did. It was impossible for us to conceal from him the baseness of Lord de Rochefort—Ah ! his name has escaped me ; I did not mean it should ; still I cannot regret that it has done so, for I learn that he has property near Heddlesham ; they say he means soon to take up his residence in this neighbourhood, and it is well that you should know really what that man is. It may not be of use to yourself, dear Miss Egerton, but to others, like my Madeline, who might be more easily entangled in the wiles of that serpent. He is very handsome, that I cannot deny. To a commanding presence he joins a most fascinating address, and to a countenance which is

anything but the index of his evil mind, he adds the witchery of a voice which is melody itself, and an assumption of rectitude which must mislead those who know nothing of his real character. Besides this, his temper is under most complete control: he can say the most cruel things in the softest manner, and no one has a greater power of making the worse appear the better part. To me he has ever seemed the counterpart of Milton's Belial—

'A fairer person lost not heaven.'

"Such was the man with whom my warm-hearted, single-minded Sidney had to deal. I cannot tell—I scarcely know the events which led to the challenge. People said that Captain Gascoigne was hasty and implacable. They knew not what reasons he had for being so; they knew not how insulting were the words in which Lord de Rochefort cavalierly told him that he had been in the habit of treating all ladies politely, and that it was beneath him to chastise a brother for the mistaken vanity of a sister."

"Impossible!" Ellen exclaimed, her cheek growing scarlet with indignation; "no man could be so cruelly insulting."

"Lord de Rochefort could. Ah, Miss Egerton, you little know that man's power: the gentle courtesy with which the stinging words were spoken, or the soft melody of the voice in which such a taunt could be uttered. Often, in happier days, has my poor Madeline repeated the words of Adalgiza, as alone able to depict that enchanter's power of voice:—

'Dolce qual arpe armonica
M'eran le sue parole,
Negli occhi suoi sorridere
Vedeà più bello un sole.'

Yes, that voice of his,—those soft eyes,—that affectation of goodness, deceived all save those who had suffered from him as we did. How these words from 'Norma' recall that time! It was Madeline who first taught me the power of association in making music tell upon our hearts. Alas! it fell on too fertile a soil. There are times now when a common song nearly drives me wild, so powerfully are its words and tones bound up with the dear, the unforgotten past. Madeline's imaginative disposition was ready to seize

on everything which harmonized with her own feelings, and I can scarcely now turn over a portfolio of music without remembering some association which connects her with the music it contains. 'Norma' was a favourite opera with her, especially after Lord de Rochefort's change; but above all, 'La Sonnambula.' I saw a song of Amina's among your music yesterday which she used to sing beautifully. Do you remember it?—the address to the withered violets,—'Pia-sasti al par d'amor.' Ah me! how these few words still thrill my heart."

"I do not wonder," Ellen said; "it is so natural to liken transient affection to the life of a fading flower."

The tone of depression which unconsciously accompanied these words seemed to strike Mrs. Stanhope, for, turning suddenly round, she said, with much earnestness, "My dear friend, my dear Miss Egerton, do not, I beseech you, allow such fantastical associations to acquire power over you. Believe one who has learned from that hard teacher Experience, that nothing is more hurtful to a young mind than to dwell on such themes. Those who are endowed with lively imaginations cannot fail to see the constant similitudes between ideal things and realities,—between thoughts and their types in nature; still it is a taste that grows by what it feeds on, and, like sympathy,—which in itself, and used in moderation, is one of the greatest sweeteners of life,—becomes, when abused, a curse. Heaven forbid that yours should ever be excited as mine has been! Heaven forbid that your young, fresh, ardent feelings should be crushed out as my dear Madeline's were! But—but I see in your tearful eyes, your quivering lip, that your sensibilities are easily excited; and I would, if I might, warn you, that if you do not keep a strict guard over them, they may one day work you bitter woe. You are not angry with me?"—seeing Ellen's cheek change colour rapidly; "you do not think me impertinent to speak thus?"

"Far from it," she said, with difficulty. "The advice is good; I thank you for it. But we are getting near home—will you not go on with your story?"

"Alas! I scarcely can. The fatal meeting took place at last—the noble Sidney fell. The villain who murdered him spent a twelvemonth in Paris and Vienna, and returned to

be, as he was before, the cynosure of all eyes, the darling of the young, the bright, the innocent, and happy.

"Sidney's death snapped asunder the fragile thread that bound Madeline to earth ;—they were buried in the same grave. Their broken-hearted parents did not linger long behind them ; and of that group who parted at Kilaloo but eighteen months before, with high hopes and bright anticipations, I alone was left.

"I had been permitted by my uncle—my aunt was then in England for some weeks—to spend a little time with the bereaved family. I had watched by my dear friend's pillow, had seen my first and only love laid in the grave, had wept with the childless parents, and in these melancholy duties had found the sole comforts I could feel. But on my aunt's return I was summoned to Dublin. I was taken from the house of mourning to the house of feasting, and was forced to assume a cheerfulness I had not, to escape listening to the abuse which otherwise was poured on those I loved better than life. I did not weep then, even in my own chamber,—my eyes were dry as my heart ; but from that time I was a changed being,—I passed through the world without interest, all was alike to me ; the crowded theatre, the gay ball, the busy world were all a desert ; the pitcher was broken at the fountain, the spring of life gone, and the golden chord broken,—the rainbow-cloud vanished ; for youth and hope were gone, as the poet so beautifully expresses it :—

'As music and splendour
Survive not the lamp and lute,
The heart's echoes render
No voice when the spirit is mute—
No voice but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruin'd cell,
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.'

"And so time rolled on. My aunt was provoked by my indifference. Again and again I refused the offers of marriage made me. I could not love again ; then how could I accept them ? But my aunt thought otherwise. She said it was nonsense ; that I must marry ; I had too small a pittance to support me in the position in life suited to her niece ; her own daughters were shortly to be introduced ;

and if I was not engaged by the time I was one-and-twenty, she would do no more for me.

"For a time I paid little heed to this threat ; but I began unconsciously to think of these things in a new light. I never could love again—that I knew ; but it was possible that I might be happier, more useful in married life than I was now. We left Dublin ; the regiment was ordered to Pierrehill, near Edinburgh. It was there I met Captain Stanhope."

As she reached this point of her story, Ellen's attention became riveted upon every word, but Mrs. Stanhope was too eager to finish what she had to say to observe it.

"We were introduced to each other. I liked him. I found in him a courteous consideration for my feelings, which—which I did not always meet with from my aunt's favourites ; but I was little prepared to learn that he had made formal proposals for my hand. I remember the whole scene perfectly. It was the first day of the year. He came very early to my aunt's ; he did not ask to see me, but bade Mrs. Markham speak to me. I wished to refuse him. I told my aunt frankly that I did not, could not care for any living creature as I had for my lost Sidney. I entreated her to tell Captain Stanhope so. She laughed at me ; told me it was bad style to talk in that way ; that it would be far better to accept him at once. But I persisted, and she promised she would comply with my wishes. I expected this would end all : but it did not. He persisted in his desire that I should be his wife, but agreed to delay our marriage until he obtained his company. As soon as he did obtain it, he came over to Newcastle, and we were married ; and now my most earnest desire is to make him as happy as I can."

Ellen listened to the conclusion of this autobiography in silent amazement. How different was Reginald's account of the same story. The riddle was more difficult to unravel than ever. There was a sincerity and appearance of good faith in Mrs. Stanhope's narrative that prevented her from disbelieving her, and yet no mention was made of the letter he had written at her unconscious suggestion. Terese seemed to believe that he had never swerved from his desire to make her his wife, to have no suspicion that, since they

met, another had usurped her place, or rather had assumed that she ought to have held in his heart.

Mrs. Stanhope went on :—

“I fear I have wearied you with my egotism, dear Miss Egerton, but I think you will forgive it, if I remind you that my reason for telling you my story was to show you how it happened that I, the wife of your old and intimate friend, know less of his tastes and habits than you do. They tell me—I mean your sister has told me—that formerly you used always to call him by his Christian name. I cannot yet acquire the courage to do so.”

“We always call him Captain Stanhope now,” said Ellen, nervously. “Formerly the habit began in childhood——”

“Dear Miss Egerton, pray do not think I regretted that you should do so ; on the contrary, I wish you did so still. I should like to accustom myself to consider him as ‘Reginald.’ Will you not gratify me by resuming your old habits ?”

“Oh no,” Ellen said, quickly ; “it is better, far better not.”

“I cannot think so. Were I of a jealous temper, it might be different ; but I am not so in the very least. On the contrary, I——” She hesitated, then said very rapidly, and with a rising colour, “I have been very confidential with you, Miss Egerton ; I shall be even more so. So far from being jealous of you, I am only surprised that, after renewing his acquaintance with you, he should have kept faith with me. He knew that I had no heart to offer him ; he knew, or might have guessed, that—that— In short, had he expressed the very slightest reluctance to fulfil his engagement with me,—had he shown by any delay in coming to me after he had obtained his company that he had forgotten me,—I should have understood his meaning, and at once relinquished any claim I might have had upon him.”

“He did not do so ?” Ellen asked, half interrogatively, and with the thought of the letter still in her mind. “He went at once, as soon as he was well enough ?”

“Yes ; there was no unnecessary delay, nothing to make me feel he regretted the engagement he had made. And yet now——” she turned very red, and then as suddenly pale, as she corrected herself—“I mean that such being the case, it is my duty, as well as my most earnest desire, to make

him happy. God knows that there is no one on earth I care for as I do for him, and that I would make any sacrifice to secure his affec—to—to insure his happiness."

"I believe it," Ellen said, cordially; "and where there is such an earnest desire, it will be fulfilled, you may depend upon it."

"Thank you! thank you! Surely it was an inspiration that made me throw my heart open to you, my dear, kind friend. Now that you prophesy so hopefully, I shall go on my path rejoicing. I am so glad to have had this talk with you before to-night. I trust my egotism has not worn you out."

"O no," Ellen said, with difficulty smiling as she did so; "I am very glad to have had this opportunity of knowing what my old friend's wife really is."

"Then you are not too tired to join us this evening? It would be such a disappointment to Captain Stanhope, as well as to me, if you were unable to appear. I should feel myself the cause."

Ellen shuddered as she listened to these words. Could she endure to see him after what she had just heard? Could she receive with common courtesy one who had spoken so speciously, and acted so falsely? Mrs. Stanhope's allusions to her marriage were too natural, too frank to be intended to mislead her; and yet what did they imply as regarded Reginald? If she believed his wife, she must disbelieve him. The idea was torture, and the thought of meeting him again overpowering. Could she not avoid it? She felt very ill,—a heaviness like lead was stealing over her; she tried to speak but could not; the whole earth seemed to turn round with her. "I am ill," she murmured at last, "weak, and very tired. Take me home quick."

Mrs. Stanhope obeyed without a word. The little ponies dashed at full gallop up the avenue. Ellen knew no more till a slight arm was round her, assisting her to alight from the carriage. When she recovered her consciousness, she was on the sofa in the boudoir, her new friend hanging over her in an agony of terror, blaming herself again and again for having overfatigued her.

"Do not distress yourself," Ellen said, as soon as she could speak;—"it is a very common thing for me to faint now.

Ever since my accident I have been liable to it. I shall be well immediately. Say nothing about it to any one," and raising herself from the couch, she pushed back the heavy curls from her face, and smiled.

"But I shall not see you to-night?"

"O yes—at least I hope so, I mean I—yes, you *shall* see me." She resolved that, come what would, she would show Reginald that she could meet him as she used to do.

Alas! poor Ellen; it was to show *him* how strong she was, to remove from *his* mind every suspicion of the truth, that she put this stress upon herself, not because it was her duty to struggle against that which now was sin.

"I am so glad to hear you say so," Mrs. Stanhope said, looking with admiration on her excited face and flashing eyes;—"it would have been a bitter disappointment to us both not to have seen you."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CONSERVATORY.

"But they are all dispersed; and, lo! she stands
Looking, in idle grief, on her white hands.

* * * *

Absorb'd like one within a dream, who dreams
That he is dreaming, until slumber seems
A mockery of itself,—when suddenly
Antonio stood before her, pale as she."

P. B. SHELLEY.

THERE is something marvellous in the power of an excited woman's will. Who that had seen Ellen Egerton half an hour before, worn and wan, depressed in mind and body, hardly fit for the exertion of dressing, could have recognized her in the drawing-room, receiving the congratulations of her friends on looking so very well, listening with smiling lips and sparkling eyes to old Mr. Walsingham's Grandisonian speeches, chatting easily with Louisa Manners, actually exchanging puns with Sir Edmund, and graciously accepting Colonel Wyndham's compliments on the steadiness of her

ponies. It is true that her eyes frequently strayed towards the door, and that a short nervous laugh frequently interrupted her sentences; but no one save cousin Frank observed her agitation.

"Stanhope is late, as usual," remarked Colonel Wyndham, when the clock struck the half-hour after seven. "He used to be the most punctual of mortals till his marriage."

"Oh!" said Louisa Manners, with her usual sneering laugh, "it is not to be expected now that he can be in time; Mrs. Stanhope's toilet must take three hours at least; indeed, the very plaiting of her hair must do that; and I have been told that she has no lady's maid, merely an old Irish nurse to wait on her. Fancy anything so absurd—an old Irish nurse! How can Captain Stanhope submit to such an infliction?"

"Well," remarked the colonel, bluntly, "all I can say is that I never knew any one who dressed so becomingly as Mrs. Stanhope. We all admire and like the little woman; she is so gentle, pretty, and spiritual-looking."

"At all events she is not *spirituelle*," said Louisa, rudely. "I never met with a more stupid, silent little thing. She has evidently no soul."

Ellen thought of that day's history, and said, hastily, "Indeed she has; she is a most interesting, charming creature, as good as she is beautiful." She chanced to raise her eyes, and saw that Sir Francis Vere was looking at her with an earnestness which made the blood rush to her face.

"You are a stanch defender of the absent, Ellen," he said, warmly; and at that moment the Stanhopes were announced.

She was very pale, whiter almost than her white dress; and the coal-black curls that hung in masses round her face, and were twisted in folds too heavy for beauty round her small head, made her look almost ghastly; but her manner was perfectly quiet and composed as she apologized for being late, owing to a slight mistake about the carriage. Sir Edmund Manners glanced angrily at his sister, who, with a little laugh, said, "Oh, dear me! I really forgot all about it; but I dare say it did not signify much."

Sir Edmund meanwhile bustled up to Mrs. Stanhope, and apologized, in the most eager manner, for his sister's stupid

mistake. He had been himself engaged in public business, and had left her directions to send the carriage, &c. &c. &c.

The pretty speeches and explanations that followed filled up the interval till dinner was announced ; and Reginald seized the opportunity of the noise and bustle the little *contretemps* had created to make his way up to Ellen, and engage her in conversation. She was at first slightly annoyed that he should do so ; but a moment's consideration reminded her it was better that he should—more like the old intimacy she wished people to believe had never been interrupted ; and it would be over soon. He must take Mrs. Egerton to dinner ; and this thought enabled her to maintain her part in the conversation with spirit for the few seconds that elapsed before they were summoned to the dining-room. Then Mrs. Egerton came up to them, exclaiming, "Captain Stanhope,—where is Captain Stanhope ? No, no ; that will never do," she added with a laugh ; "you must not hide yourself among that group of young people. You ought to remember the privilege accorded to a *nouveau marié* ; you are my cavalier ; and, Sir Francis, do you take Ellen, and pray keep her from sitting in the draught near the door. I think she is foolish to go to dinner ; but she will insist on attempting it. Ah, Captain Stanhope, young people will be young people, and like to enter into all that is going on ; besides, it is natural she should wish to dine again with her old friend and his bride."

So chattered Mrs. Egerton ; and all seemed going on as well as possible, when everything was thrown into disorder by Louisa Manners, who declared she had a cold, and could not sit near the door, or anywhere but where Ellen sat, between Sir Francis Vere and Colonel Wyndham. Ellen, with her usual good-nature, said it really did not signify to her where she sat ; she did not suffer from cold, she was certain ; and, quitting her place, was about to exchange it for Miss Manners's, when Mrs. Egerton interfered. That would not do at all. Ellen must remember she was still an invalid, and must come to her end of the table. Judith, she was certain, would give up her seat.

"Willingly," Judith said. "I always like an excuse for being next Mr. Egerton ;" and so it was finally arranged, when Ellen found herself, to her consternation, between

Sir Edmund Manners and Reginald. Her position was not an enviable one ; but her spirits were wound up to such a point, that she acquitted herself admirably, avoiding all that might have been embarrassing in conversation, and feeling most grateful to her stepmother for so engrossing Reginald's attention as to give him few opportunities of addressing herself. Already the cloth was drawn, and she was rejoicing in having got through the ordeal so easily, when Colonel Wyndham, leaning across the table, asked her whether it really was true that she was going to desert Heddlesham for the present ?

"Quite true. I return to my grandmother's as soon as I am able to undertake the journey."

"How shall we survive your loss ?"

Ellen laughed, and made some trifling answer, when Reginald suddenly said, "Why do you go to Penmorfa ?"

The question startled her ; but she answered readily, "Because I require change of scene and air."

"Is it your own suggestion, or Dr. Hunt's ?"

"I really scarcely know. We both came to the same conclusion about the same time."

"How long shall you be absent ?"

"I have not decided. A few months probably. I hope to return hither about May or June."

"And we leave Heddlesham most probably in April. I see it all."

He was silent, and she felt very uncomfortable ; it was evident he *did* see her reason for leaving home ; but pretending not to understand him, she replied, "Mrs. Floyd feels very lonely without me ; she wishes my return, and I think it will do me good to be once more at Penmorfa."

He did not seem to hear her, but after a moment's abstraction said, in a low, concentrated voice, "I wish to see you alone before you go to Wales."

Ellen shook her head. "Do not ask it ; I do not wish it."

"I must ask, nay, I must insist upon it," he answered ; and before she could again refuse, Mrs. Egerton gave the signal for the ladies to leave the dining-room.

"You look tired, love," she said, drawing Ellen's arm within her own ; "let me advise you to go and rest quietly in your boudoir for half an hour."

Ellen thanked her gratefully, and was preparing to obey, when Mrs. Stanhope came up to her, and whispered,—

“May I accompany you to that dear little room? I shall sit very quiet, very still, if I may only be allowed to be with you a little longer. They tell me you are going to Wales immediately. I did not know our parting was so near. Why did you teach me so to love you if I was so soon to lose you?” and she looked up at her with so tender and loving an expression that Ellen could not resist it. She stooped down, pressed her lips on the fair soft cheek, and said, “Come if you will, but I am too tired to speak to you.”

Mrs. Stanhope flung her arms round her neck; “God bless you for your kindness to such a selfish creature as I am.”

They entered the little apartment together. Ellen stirred the bright fire, and drawing an easy chair close to it, bade Mrs. Stanhope seat herself and rest, while, flinging herself on the low divan at the window, she looked out on the moonlit night.

“Oh, do not make me sit there,” said Mrs. Stanhope eagerly, “let me draw in this ottoman close to your feet, and sit by you. It does me good to look at you, to hold your hand in mine, to feel, to believe that you at least could learn to love poor Terese.”

“Hush, hush,” said Ellen, hastily but not unkindly, “do not speak in that way. There are many who would love you if you would let them, and—and remember that—remember that your husband has shown you by the greatest proof a man can give that *he* loves you.”

“Would to God I could believe it!” burst passionately from her lips. “I try to do so. I reason with myself that no other cause could have induced him to act as he has done; but in spite of all, a dread sometimes comes over me that there has been a misunderstanding between us on this all-important point.”

Ellen was silent. As her eyes wandered from point to point of the distant landscape, recalling the many times when she and Reginald had gazed on it together, she felt that Mrs. Stanhope might be justified in this suspicion, and yet—Well it was no use to speculate on these things now. It was better to believe that all was as it seemed to be,—that he had acted of his own free will, and that a time would come

when the past would be as a dream to all of them. She sighed as she thought thus—her sigh was echoed by Mrs. Stanhope; but it was evident from the way in which her eyes were fixed on Ellen that it was to a more distant past her thoughts were directed. After a long silence she exclaimed, "Dear Miss Egerton, you once promised to sing to me when you were strong enough. Will you think me very selfish if I ask whether you can do so to-night? I know I ought not to ask you. I remember how very tired you were this morning; still I fear that if I do not hear you to-night I may never do it."

"It is quite impossible; I cannot sing."

"Can your sister, or Miss Dashwood? I am hungering and thirsting for music."

"Judith sings very little, Kate not at all. Miss Manners——"

"Oh, I know she cannot."

"But *you* can, I know," said little Kate, stealing into the room; "and if you are so very hungry for music, you had better begin, and we shall soon get on with it. As soon as Reginald comes, I mean him to sing."

"He never does now, love."

"Oh, nonsense, he must; and so must you. Shall I take you into the other room and make you, or shall I bring you Ellen's little harp? Perhaps you can play the Welsh harp. I know it is in tune. Is it not, Ella?"

Mrs. Stanhope changed colour. "No, dear, I do not play the harp, only the guitar. If you can give me that, and if you will let me sing here, I shall do what I can to please you; but I never could make up my mind to sing before all the people in the drawing-room."

"A guitar! Oh yes, we have one," Kate said patronizingly, "and you are a good little thing for promising to sing to us;" and she ran off to seek the guitar.

Meanwhile Mrs. Stanhope's eyes fixed themselves with a dreamy languor on the harp. "It was Madeline's favourite instrument," she said, as if thinking aloud rather than addressing Ellen, "and often did we sit long ago at Kilaloo, on the terrace overhanging the rushing Blackwater, and as we listened to her rich full voice—— Ah, I am wandering into forbidden ground," she said, suddenly interrupting her-

self, as Kate returned with the guitar. "If I think of Madeline, I shall never sing," and sweeping her hand across the strings, she struck one or two minor chords, and without further prelude sang the following words:—

"The dead, the dead—oh! lay me with the dead;
I fain would seek a peaceful rest
Within the damp earth's gloomy breast—
There taste a quiet, dreamless sleep,
As dark as silent, calm as deep;
O lay me with the dead!

"The dead, the dead—far from their home hath fled,
All earthly sorrow, carking cares;
With them is peace—repose is theirs:
Why should I dread that tranquil gloom?—
Forgetfulness is in the tomb;
Then lay me with the dead."

The wild melody she sang, the rapt expression of her spirit-like face, the rich, full, and yet tremulous tones of her magnificent contralto voice, gave to the strange, inartistic words a force and fervour which almost overpowered Ellen. She rose from her reclining position, and, with half-opened lips, and wide-distended eyes, looked at her as if she desired that her sight as well as her hearing should drink in the whole beauty of the music; and her heart beat so fast she could not utter a word when it was finished.

"It is very pretty," Kate said; "but it is a very odd song, I think. I am sure I should not like to die a bit sooner than I must."

Mrs. Stanhope gave a little nervous laugh, and, turning to Ellen, asked, "Do you not think with me, that when a heart has suffered much it is very natural to look to death as its sole refuge, the grave as the only resting-place?"

"Indeed I do," Ellen said; "and yet," she added, timidly, "I am not sure that we are justified in thinking so. This world is one of trial, and we ought to endure patiently whatever sorrows it pleases Heaven to inflict upon us."

"Oh, I do not mean that," she replied,—a sudden colour flashing over her cheek and brow. "I know we ought to be patient under affliction. I know that, when it is right that we should be taken from this world to a better, we

shall be removed, and not till then. Still one cannot but wish that the time were come when—

‘Heaven, its sweet bells ringing,
Calls our spirit to a brighter world.’”

Ellen was silent. She could not but be conscious of the difference between this vague way of treating so serious a subject and that earnest piety with which Mary Beaumont would have considered it; but she was herself only beginning to have a faint and very indistinct idea of vital religion; her naturally imaginative disposition led her to dwell more on the poetic than on the practical part of it, and she did feel at that very moment how gladly she would have laid her down beneath the soft green turf and been at rest.

“Will you sing it again?” Ellen asked, after a short silence.

“Ah, Miss Egerton, you guess why I like that song. You are right. Sidney gave me the air, and—and the words were written when he was gone to a better world. But I would rather not repeat it. I have not nerve for it to-night. I shall sing you one of our real old Irish airs—one that seems to me to be peculiarly national, like the blast howling across the wide moors, and coming in fitful gusts upon the ear.”

Again she took up the guitar; but this time,

“Amid the strings her fingers stray’d,
And an uncertain warbling made.”

By degrees the chords formed themselves into a more distinct melody, and then the pure, clear voice rolled its rich volumes of sound through the rooms, as she sang the following words:—

“I would I were on yonder hill,
For then I’d sit and weep my fill,
Till every tear should turn a mill.
Escadil mavourneen shawn.

“Since my lover ceased to woo,
I have roam’d the wide world through,
To heal the heart he broke in two.
Escadil, &c.

"I track'd his footsteps o'er the moor,
I watch'd his shadow from the door,
I pray'd as I shall pray no more.
Escadil, &c.

"My wheel is stopp'd—I'll set it by ;
The tears within my eyes are dry—
I'll close their weary lids and die.
Escadil, &c."

Again Ellen listened entranced to the witching sounds ; she had never heard anything so beautiful even in her dreams, and the words went to her heart even more than those that had preceded them. The look of hopeless misery, the gasping sigh, that accompanied some of them, especially, "I pray'd as I shall pray no more," thrilled through her. This was singing, indeed ! Reginald used to praise her voice—to tell her that he loved to listen to her clear, pure tones, to her distinct articulation, and to the delicate variety of expression with which she sang. But what was that to this ? Why did he deprive himself of an enjoyment which was so intense, and which—which would draw them closer together ? Chancing to raise her eyes, as the thought struck her, she saw Mr. Walsingham standing in the doorway, with Reginald beside him.

"Ah, my dear young lady," said the old man, "I was drawn hither by the sound of music. I do so long to hear your voice once more. May I not ask for one of the charming duets you used to sing with our friend here ?"

Mrs. Stanhope looked up eagerly. "Will you ?" she said ; "I should so like it."

Ellen coloured. "It is impossible ; I have not sung for months."

Mrs. Stanhope rose from her seat, and going up to her husband, laid her hand timidly on his arm, and said, "Can you not persuade her ? Would you not like to sing with her again ?"

He had stood hitherto perfectly still, watching them, and showing neither by word nor look what was passing in his mind ; but as his wife touched him he started violently, and said, "It is for Miss Egerton to decide ; what she wishes of course I shall agree to."

Mrs. Stanhope shrunk back, as if rebuffed by this reply ; but Ellen replied, calmly, "It would give me great pleasure

to hear Captain Stanhope sing, but I am suffering too much from headache to be able to sing with him ;” and drawing his wife’s arm within her own, she left the boudoir for the drawing-room. Her father met her at the door, begging her to try one little song, however trifling ; and fairly worried into compliance, she sat down to the piano, and turned over her portfolio, unable to decide what she ought to attempt. Sir Francis Vere took up his station beside her.

“ Will you decide for me what I ought to sing ? ” she said, turning to Sir Francis, as she vainly endeavoured to select something she thought she could get through without breaking down from old association.

He hesitated. “ I know nothing of music ; I only like it because those I love do,” he said, blushing like a boy.

“ Will you sing Amina’s song to her violets ? ” Mrs. Stanhope asked. “ I do so delight in it.”

Sing that ! Well, it did not signify ; she would sing it ! To her amazement she got through it well ; her voice did not fail her, and even when she came to the words :—

“ Ma ravnivar l’ amore
Il pianto mio, ah no ! non può.”

The slight tremulousness seemed only to be demanded by the music, not occasioned by the personal feeling of the singer. A murmur of approbation followed the song ; and, resolved to go through bravely with her task, she said,—

“ That is but a melancholy ditty. I must give you one more to papa’s taste ;” and she broke forth into one of those involved Swiss songs, where the rapidity of articulation and sudden changes of measure and key attract and please even untaught ears.

“ Charming ! Delicious ! Wonderful execution ! ” were muttered on all sides. Mrs. Stanhope alone whispered,—

“ Ah ! why did you break the spell of that sweet, sad song ? I would have had it rest on my memory for ever, unmixed with baser matter.”

Ellen, remembering Dr. Hunt’s warning, “ No ghou-work, Miss Egerton,” wished most earnestly that Mrs. Stanhope could understand how little she was able to bear her trying allusions. Her nerves were so tightly strained, that another such remark would upset her composure entirely. Already

she felt as if she were losing all presence of mind, so there was nothing left but to make her escape. Luckily Louisa Manners had succeeded her at the piano, so that, under cover of a magnificently loud *galop*, she might steal away unperceived ; and having confided her intention to Sir Francis, who still hovered near her, and intrusted him to make any necessary explanations to Mrs. Egerton, she passed through the boudoir to the conservatory.

She reached the door to the hall in safety ; but as she opened it she perceived that Reginald was standing at the foot of the staircase, which she must pass to reach her own room. He turned at the slight noise made by the opening door. She glided back into the conservatory, but not before he had caught a glimpse of her retreating figure, and he hastily followed her.

There was no light in the conservatory save that of the frosty moon, which, shining full upon the tall plants and exotic shrubs, cast long ghostly shadows on all around. Ellen leaned against a marble tripod, on which stood a huge vase of flowers, which Reginald had often assisted her to replenish ; and as the moonlight fell on her white dress and whiter countenance, she looked not like a living woman, but an alabaster figure—the guardian nymph of the place.

He advanced and spoke to her. She made no answer, but stood motionless, clinging to the vase of flowers. He spoke again : “ Ellen, why do you refuse to listen to me ? Did you not promise that whatever happened, you would not misjudge me ? ”

Still she was silent ; but her quick, hard breathing showed that she heard every word.

“ I have endeavoured, again and again, to speak to you ; to offer you an explanation of much that must seem strange, almost unjustifiable in my conduct.”

“ I do not desire any explanation,” she said at last ;—“ I have said so again and again.”

“ But if I demand as a right that you should hear it ?—if I tell you that I can and will clear up everything that seems inexplicable,—nay, dishonourable in my conduct ?—will you still refuse to hear me ? ”

“ Why should you pain either yourself or me ? ” she

answered hastily. "You have done what you thought right, and I am satisfied that you have done so."

"I have done what is wrong!" he said vehemently. "I have been the victim of the basest conspiracy,—I have ruined my own happiness for life,—I have shattered that of one who—Heaven forgive me—I love better than myself. I have deceived and been deceived. There is not a more wretched being on the face of God's earth than I am, and yet you dare to say that I have done right, and you are satisfied! Ellen, you know this is not true."

Stunned and stupefied by the vehemence of his words and manner, she could only answer,—“I thought it was—I—you forget I am very weak and ill. This agitation kills me; leave me, I entreat you.”

“If you will promise to hear all I have to say hereafter, I will; but you have hitherto treated me as if—as if, Ellen, you had forgotten what once we were to one another,—as if all were blotted out—our early companionship, the friendship of later years, the—— Well, well, I will say no more. It breaks my heart to see you weep—to see that dear cheek so pale, that little hand so thin and shadowy. But oh! Ellen, if you have suffered, so have I. You have no remorse in your heart—nothing to make you feel ‘it is my own doing.’ With me it is otherwise; I have deserved some punishment, but not this fiery trial;—oh no, not this!”

“They are calling you,” said Ellen, interrupting him. “Do you not hear them? You must not be found here. Leave me, I beseech you.”

A muttered curse broke from him as he released the hand she had hitherto vainly endeavoured to snatch from him.

“I must go now; but once more I must see and speak to you alone.”

He was gone; but Ellen could not move,—she trembled in every limb; so that it was only by twining her arms closely round the marble vase that she could save herself from falling. The heaviness that had so often of late seemed ready to crush her to atoms, stole over her again,—the rushing sounds filling her ears, the dimness stealing over her sight; and many minutes elapsed before her recollection returned sufficiently to allow her to perceive she was alone in the cool green conservatory, with the quiet moon

and gentle stars looking down on her from the blue heavens above.

Was it, then, all a dream? No; his deep voice still vibrated on her ear,—his reproachful glance still chilled her heart; she still beheld the flashing eye and pallid cheek which had looked so awful in the moonlight. But it was over now; and perhaps it was the last time they should ever meet. Would that they had not parted in anger! A few tears fell from her eyes at the thought. He had caused her very bitter sorrow,—his strange conduct had cost her many and many a night's sleep; but the thought of never seeing him again came over her with a pang of such intense sorrow, that she shuddered to find how entirely her happiness had been bound up in him,—how every thought of her mind, every feeling of her heart, had been devoted to him only.

There was no necessity for concealment now. She was alone,—quite alone, with no eye to watch her bitter sorrow, save that of the pure placid queen of night, who seemed to look down in pity on her grief.

She glanced round the little apartment: it, like everything else in her father's house, was associated with the time they had spent together; yet all around her was fresh, and fair, and unscathed, as it used to be,—each flower sending up its perfumed incense to the quiet night, or waving gently to the slight air that found its way through the half-open door. She pressed her hands on her burning eyeballs, as if she hoped, by closing the organs of bodily sight, to crush out all the haunting memories that oppressed her. But it was all in vain;—thicker and thicker they rushed upon her. She felt, if she lingered there another instant, she should go mad; and, gathering all her shattered energies into one great effort, she crept slowly and sadly to her room.

That night was one she never forgot; though to no one did she ever confide the depth of misery she then endured.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REGINALD'S LETTER.

"As she came to the last word she bowed her head in silence over the writing, and felt as if some mighty rock had fallen upon her heart, and crushed it to dust."—BULWER.

WE have said that there is something marvellous in the power of an excited woman's will. It is so ;—few things can resist it for the time : it sweeps aside all common rules, it gives strength to weakness, calmness to despair, and enables a trembling, delicate woman to do that which few men could accomplish in like circumstances. But the excitement over, what a change ! Like the clock whose machinery has run down,—the fire deprived of fuel,—no sooner is the exertion over, than she falls back into that state of exhaustion which those who have once seen shrink from ever beholding again.

There are some nights in almost every life so terrible, that those who have passed through them feel that for all the world they would not endure them again. Such was to Ellen the night that followed her interview with Reginald in the conservatory. The next day she was too ill to rise ;—the next and the next she was worse. Everybody said that it was a pity that she had overtasked her strength so soon. Every one regretted that she had made the exertion of appearing at that dinner-party for the Stanhopes ; but the gossip regarding Reginald's marriage was over ; and it never entered the general mind that *he* could have anything to do with this last relapse. There had been no interruption of the friendly relations between the Egertons and Stanhopes. Mrs. Stanhope was a constant visitor at the Park,—was evidently a favourite with them all, especially with Miss Egerton ; and the first time that Ellen had made the exertion of appearing at dinner was to receive the Stanhopes ; yet, though gossip failed to implicate either one or other of them, both Reginald and his wife secretly accused themselves of being the cause of this fresh attack of illness. Neither,

however, ventured to confess their secret dread that it was so, though each eagerly endeavoured to gain news of her, and, if possible, to see her once more before she went to Penmorfa.

Mrs. Stanhope only was successful, and that the very evening before Ellen's departure. The interview was very short; and it was well it was so, for it was trying to both of them. Before it ended, Ellen was obliged to yield to the eager entreaties of her new friend that she would allow her to write to her, and sometimes—only sometimes—would answer her letters. She doubted the wisdom of this promise; but it was drawn from her by entreaties she had not the heart to resist. Perhaps, too, she had not yet acquired sufficient self-denial to break asunder *every* tie that bound her to the past.

When on the point of leaving her, Mrs. Stanhope turned back to say, "I almost forgot my husband's message. He bade me tell you that he bitterly regrets not having seen you again. He wished it very much; but, as that cannot be, he will write to you. I told him if he had anything to say he had better write; he knows, as you do, that I am not jealous."

A faint, sad smile lighted up her face as she said this; and then, as if no longer able to restrain herself, she threw her arms round Ellen's neck, kissed her repeatedly and passionately, and exclaimed, "It tears my very heartstrings to part with you,—I feel as if we should never, never meet again; but if we do not, promise me you will never forget poor Terese, but will always feel a little love and a great deal of pity for her. Promise me, dear Miss Egerton!"

Ellen did promise;—how could she help it! The next day saw her journeying by easy stages to Penmorfa.

Longfellow has well said, "The setting of a great hope is like the setting of the sun,—the brightness of our life is gone; shadows of evening fall around us, and the world seems but a dim reflection, itself a broader shadow. We look forward into the coming lonely night,—the soul withdraws into itself." Though less distinctly expressed, such were Ellen's thoughts as she quitted her father's house to return to the home of her childhood.

It was scarcely a year since she had travelled along that

same road with the bright, hopeful anticipations of a young girl. Where were they gone now? Crushed and dead, like the last year's flowers. The flowers would revive again, but from her heart "a joy had taken flight" that could never return. Time might, nay would, bring resignation; already she submitted to her fate,—she accepted it as a thing that was done, and could not be undone; but she could never again experience that buoyancy of heart, that unsuspecting confidence in human nature, that unclouded vivacity, which, when once gone, is gone for ever.

In early youth there is a faith in the perfection of our kind, which, like the haze of a summer's morning, flings a charm over everything we see, gives a gentler beauty to all that is fair, and hides from us all that is harsh or unpleasing in the landscape. The sun rises high in the heavens, and dries up the gem-like dew; the silvery curtain is withdrawn, and displays the full noonday splendour of the waving corn, the smiling garden, the leafy woods; but, alas! it also shows us the desolate and ruined cottage, the neglected homestead, the blasted tree.

Delusion is past;—we still believe that there is some good in the world, but see that there is evil also; the dream-haze of romance passes away, and stern reality succeeds.

Ellen had reached this point of life; she had learned the vanity of pleasure, and had suffered in her affections; but she had not learned the use to which such lessons might be turned. She had heard it said that many a seeming misfortune has, in the end, proved itself a blessing,—that from seeming evil good arises, and that more men are brought to God by trial and suffering than by prosperity,—and she believed it was true; but her belief was the credit which we give to a proposition we cannot gainsay, rather than to a truth which takes a deep hold of our hearts and becomes the actuating principle of our lives.

Unconsciously to herself, she was still kicking violently against the pricks, rebelling against the suffering she endured, doubting its justice; or, if not that exactly, desiring to exchange her appointed cross for one which, to her short-sighted vision, was more suited to her strength.

As she proceeded on her journey, her thoughts turned in some degree from the past to speculate on the reception

she should have from Mrs. Floyd. Would it be possible to deceive her keen eye—to persuade her to believe that physical suffering alone had changed a young laughing girl into a languid, wan, and woeworn woman? She trusted so. She would do her best to confirm this impression. It would be easy to do so if she could avoid discussing Reginald; but how could she? Her grandmother loved him, and would, she knew, allude to him perpetually. And the letter Mrs. Stanhope had said he meant to write—what exculpation could it contain of his double-dealing to her and to his wife? But why endeavour to follow out her vague wandering thoughts? Such half-formed fancies are too evanescent for repetition. Swifter than light they dart from point to point, and we vainly strive to connect together the almost invisible links of the chain of thought; they fade into each other like the subtle hues of the rainbow—often, like them, to melt into tears.

At length she reached Penmorfa,—at length was clasped in her grandmother's arms, listened to the greetings of the old servants, who crowded round to see their dear Miss Ellen once more, to express their satisfaction that they had not kept her altogether in England, but that she was restored again to her own people, her own natural home. Again she found her favourite Skye terrier, Bustle, leaping round her in frantic delight, making darts at her feet and springs at her hands, accompanied by short, sharp barks of ecstasy. Again she saw the old rooms she had known from infancy, looking as unchanged in every respect as they had been all her life. She might have quitted them yesterday, so strongly was every trifling article of furniture or ornament stereotyped in her memory; but the contrast of these familiar objects with her own altered feelings was too much for her, and hiding her face on Mrs. Floyd's bosom, she wept as if her heart would break.

But the passion of grief passed; she remembered her resolution not to betray her secret sorrow, and perceiving that Mrs. Floyd attributed her emotion to the weakness of recent illness, she took courage to make further efforts.

"You do look terribly pulled down, my poor, dear child," said Mrs. Floyd, fondly caressing her; "and yet they wrote to me you were getting quite strong after your accident."

"Yes ; but—but at home one cannot escape going out," said Ellen, reddening at being guilty of such an equivocation.

"I understand, love ; I know well enough that there must always be some gadding about wherever Mrs. Egerton is ; but here you will soon get strong again. There is no opportunity here of going too much into society."

Ellen sighed, and said "No ;" and she was glad of it. She wished to return to where she had left everything,—at Penmorfa ; it would be very pleasant to do so ; and as she had been absent exactly a year, it would be very easy to believe she had never been away at all. When she left home, there was only the very faintest tint of green on the earliest trees ; the larches had scarce hung out their tassels, the laurustinas were still in flower, and so were the snowdrops and the hepaticas.

"And see there, grannie, how bright the sun falls on that bed of golden crocuses ; how cheerily the blackbird and thrush are singing ; how softly green the new shoots of the ivy are ; and there—there, just as I left it, is one single crimson China rose, close by the schoolroom window ; and my old pet, the peacock, is pecking at the lower pane, that I may feed him, as I used to do. Tell me, grannie, have I been away ? or have I dreamed all that has passed this last twelvemonth ?"

"Nay, darling, it has been sober earnest to me your being away, though to you no doubt the time has passed like a dream ; and—save that ugly accident—a very pleasant dream too. Is it not so, my Ellen ?"

"Ah, yes, I have enjoyed some part of my dream very, very much."

"And Reginald being there was so charming."

"Very charming——" she stopped for an instant, and then added, "and his wife is the most beautiful little creature you can imagine, and so affectionate and loving to me."

"Ah, that is right ; that is what should be. I want so much to hear about Regi's wife. It startled me at first to hear of his marriage ; but it was a long engagement you say ?"

"Five years, I believe."

"And she is really a nice little thing ?"

"Nice is not the word ; she is the most fascinating, beau-

tiful creature possible ; with coal-black hair and eyes, and a complexion so delicate that——”

“Awell ! that is not the sort of beauty I expected Regi would admire. But if she loves him,—if she is good and affectionate, and all that, it signifies little whether her eyes are black or blue. But you eat nothing, my child ; do try to take one more little morsel of chicken, or one other half-dish of tea. Mrs. Davies has been exerting all her power to prepare a tea such as Miss Ellen used to like, and you have done no justice to it.”

“I am so tired, dear grannie, I would rather go to bed.”

“My darling, you must be easily exhausted to think of going to bed at six o'clock.”

“I am, dear grannie, more so than I thought ; but it will rest me to feel myself at home again.”

The old lady pressed her fondly to her heart ; it gratified her to hear her still speak of Penmorfa as home, and that pleasant thought comforted her for the change that had passed over her darling. She satisfied herself, however, as old people do, that as the over-excitement of a life constantly passed in society is naturally hurtful, so one passed in solitude must be beneficial ; in short, that the reverse of wrong must be right ; but such is not always the case ;—it was not so now. The sudden change from hourly excitement and constant bustle to the dead calm of a retired country house, where everything went like clockwork,—where hour after hour, day after day, week after week, the same monotonous round of events followed each other,—was too much for Ellen. It was not the calm of repose, but that of inanition. Her thoughts, without anything to draw them forcibly to the present, insensibly strayed towards the past, and the conclusion of almost all her reveries was, Will he write ; and how ? She blamed herself now for having denied him the opportunity of explaining himself to her openly. Every man is entitled to speak in his own defence before he is judged. Moreover, she had promised that she never would believe evil against him without absolute proof ; yet how had she kept this promise ? She had flattered herself that she had acted from principle in refusing to hear him ; now she began to suspect the purity of her own motives ; to persuade herself that mortified vanity, cowardice, anything rather than

principle had actuated her. She made herself miserable by imagining the possible evil that might arise from folly, and then, weak and worn as she was, she would fling herself on her bed, and exclaim, "Oh, that I knew the truth! Oh, that that letter would come! Then I should be at peace; I should have no further doubt, no further anxiety. Then I could forget him; but I cannot now."

The letter came at last. It was a huge packet, and Mrs. Floyd, as she put it into her hands, said, "I think, dear Ellen, that will take you a pretty long time to read, so I shall not wait for you to accompany me to the farm; you may join me by-and-by. It is from Reginald, is it not?"

"Yes,"—and her heart beat so she could scarcely steady her voice to answer,—"yes; I did not see him before I left, and his wife told me he would write."

"Oh, his *wife* brought the message," said the old lady, with a laugh; "then it is all right. *Some* young wives would not quite have approved of their husbands sending such very long letters to any one but themselves."

"Mrs. Stanhope has no pettiness of that sort," said Ellen warmly.

"Dear child! did you fancy I was in earnest? How could you, Ellen?" and she stooped down and kissed her burning cheek. "I have too much love for my old favourite Regi not to have complete faith in him. I am sure he would never do anything but what was right, honest, and straightforward."

Ellen said nothing,—she could not have uttered a word to save her life; but she drew her grandmother's arm more closely round her, and affectionately returned her kiss; and then, when the old lady left her, she rose up slowly, and retiring to her own pretty sitting-room, closed and bolted the door. She had long expected this letter,—it seemed to her as if her future happiness or misery hung upon its contents; and yet she did not open it at once;—she laid it, still sealed, on the table, and then walked to the window. It fronted the south, and the full glare of the morning sun shone into the room. She pulled down the blind, and then returned to the table where she had laid the letter, but stopped on her way thither to pick up and carefully arrange a tidy, which had fallen from her favourite lounging-chair. Then

she drew the chair close to the table, took up the letter, and looked at the address. She took time to observe what a delicate yet manly handwriting it was; recalling at the same time a discussion she had once had with Judith on the peculiarity of the handwriting of Oxonians. Judith admired that of Cambridge men more, but Ellen had insisted that there, as in other things, Oxford bore away the palm. And then she weighed the letter in her hand, and again wondered what were its contents. But she must not be a coward, she must break the seal; and yet, before she did so, she delayed a moment to observe how well-cut the demi-lion of the crest was, and to remark the motto, "In hoc signo vinces."

But at last the letter was opened. It was indeed a long one. It began by saying that he had earnestly desired to speak to her, rather than to write, because he had wished to save her from those tedious explanations which are necessary in a letter, while they can be given by a few words in speaking;—but he had yielded to necessity, and must ask her pardon if he engrossed more of her time than he had wished to do. The preamble was very formal. He wrote as if uncertain of his own position,—as if deeply mortified by her refusal to listen to him,—and yet with a determination that she should do him justice. He recalled to her their first introduction, when his mother brought him, a mere boy, to Penmorfa, and introduced him to the little, timid, blue-eyed child who was for so many years afterwards his companion and his friend. He touched slightly on the grief of their first parting,—of his indulgent mother's yielding to his boyish wishes, and spending a few weeks of every holiday-time in their neighbourhood, until he went to Oxford. And then, as if he felt that all danger of speaking of Penmorfa and its inmates were passed, he wrote more easily; reminded her how his career at the university had been broken off by his mother's death, and his resolute determination to enter the army rather than prosecute the study of the learned professions.

"It had been better for me," he wrote, "had my guardians been more peremptory with me, and insisted that I should complete my full residence at Oxford before deciding on my future destiny. But I was wilful; I insisted that already I was older than most young men when entering the

army, and that nothing could ultimately prevent me from becoming a soldier. So they yielded to my persuasions, and a cavalry commission was purchased for me.

"You remember the ecstasy with which I wrote to Pen-morfa of my success—how lightly I answered Mrs. Floyd's kindly remonstrances at having thus put aside my mother's wishes for my own. You remember my short visit before I joined—my promise to return frequently to the place I looked on as home—my repeated injunctions to you to write to me every week? I never thought that that time would pass away, these feelings alter; but I have told you what my regiment was,—I need not repeat all that; I need not tell you that such a life as I led there soon changed me from a right-hearted, though wilful boy, into a careless, reckless man.

"I described to you my acquaintance with Miss Lefevre, how my pity for one so retiring and gentle led me to feel a certain interest in her; but that beyond a few polite words, a few ordinary civilities, my attentions did not go. It was, however, natural that even such trifling consideration as I paid to her should be misunderstood by our fellows. They constantly twitted me with my devotion to the 'Snowdrop;' assured me that Mrs. Markham had long set me down as her lawful prey, and ended by laying bets to a considerable amount that within a twelvemonth I should be either married or engaged to the fair Terese.

"They were not men to shrink from any means of gaining their wager. I told you of that 31st of December—of the ball to which we all went together, and that on leaving it my companions congratulated me on my engagement, and themselves on the success of their bets. I told you also how I found myself so drawn into Mrs. Markham's toils that I could not escape without making an *esclandre* I was desirous to avoid. But I did not tell you, for I did not then know myself how treacherously she had dealt with me throughout, or how skilfully she had laid her plans to make my engagement with her niece indissoluble.

"Ignorant of the truth, I plighted my word to Terese in most perfect good faith, and with the sincere intention to make her a happy wife; but Mrs. Markham's own double-dealing made her suspect a like duplicity in me, and she

insisted on innumerable guarantees of my word ; even going so far as to persuade me to settle the small remainder of my property on her niece, should my death occur before our marriage took place. I was utterly indifferent to these precautions, only despising her for her mean suspicions of me, and rejoicing that it was not Terese's *mother* who made herself so contemptible.

" You know how we parted. I earnestly desired to redeem the lost time and opportunities of my youth, but still more earnestly to secure the affections of my betrothed. In the one aim I was successful, in the other I failed entirely. My endeavours to secure her confidence were unavailing,—my expressions of interest in her were coldly reciprocated ; and at last it became more a duty than a pleasure to maintain our correspondence.

" I did do so, however. I wrote to her of having renewed my acquaintance with you ; and persuaded myself that when I was able thus openly to mention you to her I was safe. Of what followed I dare not write. I went to Ireland at last, summoned thither by Mrs. Markham, who insisted that I should make my intentions plain, by speaking openly to Terese. I armed myself against all interference between us, resolved that nothing should force me to act against my ideas of right. I was ready to relinquish all my little fortune to Terese, but was determined not to marry one woman when my heart was given to another.

" I thought I knew Mrs. Markham, but I did not know of what she was capable to relieve herself of one who now hung heavy on her hands, and whose beauty and modesty made her own daughters neglected.

" She received me with civility, but in our first interview made it perfectly plain to me that she was determined to hold me to my promise. She spoke of Terese's feelings towards me, of the injury it would do her in the eyes of the world to have so long an engagement broken off without any good reason save my fickleness. To these arguments I was callous ; I felt it were a greater injury to swear a false oath at the altar. But this was not the end. She reminded me that our engagement had been made in Scotland, declared that again and again I had before witnesses spoken of Terese as my wife, and that, by the law of Scotland, that con-

stituted a marriage. I denied emphatically that I had done so. She assured me that she had documents to prove it, and that she had in her possession sundry letters of mine in which I had signed myself to Terese 'your affectionate husband.' As these words were uttered, I remembered that, with the folly of an excitable young man, I had *once* signed a letter thus, endeavouring by such an expression of affection to draw Terese from her unflinching reserve and impassibility. But I little guessed how these words could be made to serve the purposes of a cunning woman.

"I cannot drag out the degrading history farther ;—it is enough that the documents she showed me—not only letters in my own handwriting, but regularly-drawn-up certificates in that of my brother officers, staggered me. Still, the matter was too serious to be trifled with ; I wrote to one of my old Oxford acquaintance, then stationed in Scotland, and begged him to find out for me how far I was really implicated by the papers of which Mrs. Markham had possessed herself. I inclose his answer :—

“GLASGOW, October 28.

“MY DEAR FELLOW,—Your friend, or yourself—I suspect it is the latter, in spite of your prudent substitution of the one word for the other—has, I assure you, got into a most decided scrape. I have consulted more than one limb of the law here, and all agree that the wisest course to be pursued is to marry the lady, and forget that it has been force, and not inclination, that has tied the fatal knot. Law proceedings in such matters are dilatory and disagreeable, and neither party ever comes satisfactorily out of the business. It seems to have been a regular swindle on the part of the relations ; but you may be thankful if the girl has known nothing of the business. From what you say, I doubt her being aware of it. Take care that she never is.—Yours heartily,

“‘E. HOWARD.’

“This was enough. I stood out no longer. I saw that if Mrs. Markham forced on law proceedings, I should be a marked man ; if I lost my suit, my wife must detest me for having brought her name so disgracefully before the public ; and if I succeeded, I should be looked on as one from whom all women of true delicacy must shrink. I accepted my fate,

and thank Heaven poor Terese never knew, never will know, that anything occurred to make me regret my marriage.

"It was over ; and then, but not till then, an accidental meeting with one of my old corps discovered to me that the certificate which had sealed my fate was a false one, intended as a practical joke, forgotten as soon as executed, and done at the time merely to facilitate the winning of their bet that I should be engaged to the Snowdrop within the twelve-month. They had handed the document over to Mrs. Markham, but were totally guiltless of any intention to abet her in her wicked schemes.

"Of Mrs. Markham's treacherous and cruel conduct I dare not speak. We parted with bitter words, never, I trust, to meet again. As to poor Terese, God help her, for her fate is a hard one ; and mine—but of that I dare not write. After the discovery of the cheat put upon me, I believed that no human being could be more miserable than I then was ; but I soon learned that that depth of misery had a deeper still.

"I returned to Heddlesham to find that gossip had been busy with my affairs, and that my worse than folly had made you talked of as well as myself ; and your altered manner when we met showed that you gave some credit to what was said against me. This I had not expected ; and I claimed as a right what I should have asked only as a favour,—that you should hear my story. You refused me, and I was angry ; nay, worse than that, I was coxcomb enough to believe that your illness was in some degree occasioned by your disappointment in me ; and I persuaded myself that it was for your sake more than my own that I pressed such an explanation on you. I have of late greatly changed my opinions on this subject ; and I only repeat them now to account for my strange conduct towards you, and to express to you my contrition for my folly. My wife became your constant companion. I saw that you grew daily more attached to each other ; and—Heaven forgive me !—I hated poor Terese for coming between us, as I fancied she did. Our interview in the conservatory brought me to my senses ; and now, though I still believe that it is my duty to clear up the mystery of my conduct, I do so in a very different spirit from what I might once have done. I now ask your

forgiveness, humbly, repentantly. I see at last that I have no right to demand it, and seek it as a matter of pure grace. You have behaved towards me as a true woman ought; and at length I perceive my conduct to you in its real light. At first I was unconscious of its full enormity. The sufferings I had undergone, the treachery to which I had fallen a victim, made me shut my eyes to the part I had myself had in bringing this misery upon me. I begin to see it now—that my own folly, my own imprudence, my own intemperance, laid me open as the ready dupe of that—that woman.

“But it is too late now to think of these things,—too late, at least, for reparation, but not, I trust, for repentance. Even towards Terese I feel guilty; for I have deprived her of a friend whose sympathy, whose example, had been of the utmost benefit,—who might have taught her much that she could not learn with Mrs. Markham.

“She tells me she has asked you sometimes to write to her. If I dare beseech a favour of you, it would be to comply with her request; but I will not press it,—it may be disagreeable to you; but if it is not,—if you can still feel an interest in anything belonging to me,—pray let me assure you that I shall never attempt to bring myself before you through my wife’s means. This is the last time I shall ever address you,—the last time I shall ever ask you to answer me.

“To this letter I do desire one line in reply,—one word, at least, to assure me that it has reached its destination safely, and that, believing that the injury I have done you was not instigated by cold-blooded villany, you forgive me.

“If you do not grant my request, I shall regret your denial; but, believe me, I shall still desire your best welfare, even should it consist in forgetting me. Farewell!—farewell for ever!

“R. S.

“P.S.—Were it possible, I would fain keep this dark page in my history from the knowledge of my dear mother’s friend, Mrs. Floyd; but I will not demand your secrecy,—act as you think best and most judicious. Sir Francis Vere is the only living creature who knows what I have told you.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RETROSPECTION.

"This is a truth the poet sings,
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is—remembering
happier things." TENNYSON.

ELLEN closed the letter, and drawing her writing-case towards her, she seized a pen, and wrote as follows :—

"PENMORFA, March 25, —.

"I have received your packet. I have read every word, and do in all sincerity and truth forgive you. You have been the victim of a wicked conspiracy, and I look upon you as more sinned against than sinning. Thank God, your wife is innocent of all knowledge of what has passed. She believes in your affection, and loves you more than aught the earth contains. May God bless you both. I shall keep my promise to Terese.
"E. E."

It was done ; she closed her short letter, sealed it, addressed it carefully, and then advancing towards the grate, where the fire burned brightly, she threw Reginald's packet into the very heart of the flames, watched the long tongues of fire gather round it, now burning part entirely, now merely scorching the edges, and seeming to make one or two of the words stand out strongly from the paper in letters of lurid light. Ah ! how her heart thrilled to watch the destruction of that which a beloved hand had written ! how strong the temptation was to rescue it even yet—torn, scorched as it was ! and when the last spark was extinguished, when nothing but ashes remained, how terrible was the agonized wish—"Would to God I could as easily forget all of which that paper was the record !"

She could not forget, but she could still act. She quitted her room, she placed her letter in the post-bag, and hastened to join her grandmother in the garden, from which her voice now proceeded.

"Ah, love ! you are come at last. You have got through your huge packet ?"

"Yes, I have answered it," she said, quietly. "Can I help you in anything, grandmamma?"

The old lady rose from the stooping posture in which she was staking up a fine jouquil, which was half weighed down by the weight of its many blossoms, and said, with a half-merry, half-reproachful laugh, "Does that mean I am not to see what that long letter contains? Well, well, the young are very different nowadays from what they used to be!"

"I cannot show you the letter," Ellen said, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyes; "if it concerned myself only, I should have done so; but as it does not, I burned it."

"Burned it?" and an angry light glanced in Mrs. Floyd's clear hazel eyes. "I must say, Ellen, that you astonish me by such a confession. What can you mean by this strange conduct? You receive a long letter—it matters little from whom—it is enough that you read it alone, and then, instead of bringing it to me, as you ought to have done, you destroy it!"

"I told you my reason, grandmamma," said Ellen, firmly.

"Girls of your age ought to have no secrets from those who stand towards them in the light of their parents."

Ellen hesitated; accustomed from infancy to trust to others rather than herself, she shrunk from the tone rather than the words of Mrs. Floyd's reproof. Her grandmother saw the effect she had produced, and waited a moment in hopes of an answer; but it did not come.

"Well!" she exclaimed, at length, "am I to hear, since I cannot now see the contents of that letter?"

Ellen shook her head. "I cannot tell you," she said; "the secret is not mine to give."

"Not yours to give! I am sure, Ellen, that Reginald Stanhope would never intrust any secret to you that he would wish to be kept from me. However, take your own way. I never ask a thing twice; if you do not choose to tell me, say so at once, and there is an end of it."

This taunting speech was very trying to Ellen; but her determination to shield Reginald from the animadversions which she well knew would be poured upon him if Mrs. Floyd were intrusted with his very awkward and suspicious history, enabled her to hold steadily to her purpose.

"Do not urge me to say more, grandmamma; I would if

I might; but I do not feel entitled to do so. Therefore I hope you will not ask it of me."

Her voice quivered, and she turned her soft eyes so beseechingly on her grandmother, that she said more gently, "I cannot understand the change that has come over you, Ellen. When you left me you were the most gentle, biddable, loving child that ever blessed the heart of a foolish old woman; but now you follow your own ideas of right, you have your secret thoughts, your mysteries, your reservations."

Ellen burst into tears. "Oh! grannie," she said, deprecatingly, "spare me just now. I am so tired, so worn out, I cannot think, cannot judge what is right; but I assure you it is from no want of confidence in you that I am silent, nor of love for you either, dear grannie—I love you now as much, or more, than I ever did."

Mrs. Floyd was touched by her emotion. "I believe you, my child," she said, relentingly; "and yet I so detest mysteries, that I wish you had none from me. I cannot myself see the necessity, even now. Reginald Stanhope knows my feelings on this point; and I am sure he would be the last person to advise you to estrange your confidence from your best friend."

Ellen made no answer. Old and new habits were at war within her; the one urging her to open her whole heart to her grandmother, the other to follow the indication he had given of his wishes. The last power prevailed. She persuaded herself that she was right to yield to it. She was no longer the young untaught girl who had gone forth unarmed into the strife and turmoil of the world, but a woman to whom suffering had taught prudence and reserve. It was true that Reginald had left her free to act as she thought best; but had they not both often regretted the strength of Mrs. Floyd's prejudices; had they not both agreed that in any difficulty they would seek some less relentless judge than she would prove? She could not tell her.

She bitterly regretted this decision later; for though for the present it saved her from much that had been trying to hear, trying to tell,—it encouraged a habit of reserve and concealment which is one of the greatest banes of a woman's happiness in life. The first trifling concealment seems as nothing to a young girl. She fancies that it cannot signify

that she did not mention to mamma that she met so-and-so at such a place,—that such-and-such words were exchanged. But in this, as in other things, "*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.*" The habit grows, until concealment becomes deceit; and when deceit once gains a footing in the heart, where does the evil end?

Would that the young could learn that frankness, openness, confidence in their parents, is the greatest human safeguard! and that the old could perceive that confidence, like "love, is a tender herb, which must be kept alive by great delicacy; it must be fenced from all inclement blasts, or it will droop its head and die."

It is too true a simile. Look at the eager child, rushing to tell its mother of some accident which has befallen it, occasioned by its own carelessness; see how the light fades from its loving eyes if the "inclement blast" of anger is the reward of its confidence, instead of the balmy breath of sympathy and forgiveness. Do you suppose that child will bring its next grief to its mother? Or that young man who, entangled in his first scrape, goes frankly to his father and confesses all; if he be received with abuse or violence, will he not leave his so-called "best friend" with a full determination for the future to keep his own counsel? It must be so; confidence begets confidence, and sympathy sympathy; both are "herbs of great delicacy," and very liable "to droop their heads and die."

But such was not Mrs. Floyd's creed. Brought up herself under the stern old iron law of unquestioning obedience to parental control, it never occurred to her that the rule of love is more powerful than that of authority; and while idolizing both her daughter and grand-daughter, she had never cultivated those sweet, gentle interchanges of feeling which are charming between the young and old at all times, but are the greatest sweeteners of life when they subsist in their full beauty between a mother and her grown-up children. Reserved herself, she never thought of opening her own heart to her children; yet, looking upon their confidence as a right which belonged to a parent, she exacted rather than sought it, and therefore received it far less fully than she might have done.

Even at the present moment, a few gentle words, a few

encouraging expressions, had unlocked Ellen's heart, which yielded almost too readily to the persuasive voice of affection ; but, unluckily, Mrs. Floyd was far too proud a woman to sue for that which she had been once refused ; so the conversation ended in uncomfortable silence, and neither of them ever again alluded to the subject. But though the cloud between them passed away, the cheerfulness of their old life together did not return. The last twelvemonth had produced a marked change in Mrs. Floyd ; she was visibly older, and the unacknowledged decrease of the powers of life made her irritable and impatient,—failings which Ellen had never previously observed. She was becoming very jealous of interference of any kind, and many trifling duties which her grandchild had been accustomed to fulfil before she left home, she now insisted on performing herself, although she could only do so imperfectly.

Thus Ellen was reduced to seek occupation where she could ; and as her health still prevented much physical exertion, she had little to distract her thoughts, and allowed them too often to stray in the forbidden direction. Reginald's letter had not brought the peace she had expected it to bring, nor had it tended to make her forget the past. On the contrary, it had forced upon her the feeling that their fate had been *unjust* ; that but for the machinations of others, all had gone right—Reginald and she had been happy ; and Terese ?—Terese would not have been miserable ; she had herself said so.

Misery is very selfish, and very egotistical as well ; and many a bitter and unkind thought passed through poor Ellen's mind, as, tossing on her sleepless bed or seated at the bow-window of her chamber, she passed the long dreary spring nights, and bemoaned her hard fate.

What had she done to bring such sorrow upon her ? Why was she the sufferer for the evil deeds of others ? Why was she alone selected to be so miserable ? Poor child ! how little she knew of the common fate of man ! how little suspected that there are few hearts, as well as hearths, where there is not some empty chair, that was once the resting-place of a lost love !

How tedious the hours seemed, as she marked night after night the play of the moonbeams on the waters of the

broad Conway, rolling beneath her window, or, outwatching the stars, saw the pale light of the false dawn steal over all.

"Ah, yes!" she would exclaim with a shudder, "my life henceforward will be like the grey, cold dawn!—night has come down over the scene, and blotted out all that promised so much beauty;—the very stars are gone out now. There is not a sound of life; the birds are silent, and a heavy mist shrouds tree, and hill, and water, as grief overshadows my sad heart. What a contrast to this time last year!"

It was, indeed, a contrast; and taking it for granted that she should always feel as she did now, she saw no rest but in the grave; and often did the refrain of poor Terese's song, "Oh, lay me with the dead!" come back to her memory in these long nights of watching; and she wished—oh, how ardently!—that such an aspiration might be fulfilled.

Forgetting how little she had done of her appointed work on earth, she longed to lie down and rest at the very commencement of life's pilgrimage; her one trial seemed to her a sufficient apology for yielding to hopeless, useless despondency. She fancied that her sufferings exceeded those of others, and therefore could not be judged by common rules; or at least that her situation was in many respects so different from that of most people, that though exertion might be required of them, it was not of her. No one relied on her for happiness,—she had no tangible duties to perform; why then might she not indulge her grief in secret? She injured no one but herself, if she even did that. She was content that her life should be summed up, like that of Thekla, in the five words, "I have lived and loved;" and, indeed, persuaded herself that nothing more was required of her. Is this an unfrequent idea among women? Alas! no; and yet it is not all that *any* human being has to do on earth, though it requires sharp and repeated suffering to convince some of this truth. Ellen was not yet convinced of it; though those same natural types which she had forced into comparison with her sorrow might have taught her a hopeful lesson. When the appointed hours of night had passed away, the world awoke once more to joy and gladness;—the haze rolled off, and the trees and fields shone green in

the sunlight ; the swallows twittered in the eaves, flocks of early rooks filled the air with their cheerful cawing, every blade of grass glistened with dewdrops ; all that seemed gloomy an hour ago awoke to freshness and beauty, while a thousand nameless but rural sounds rose upon the balmy breath of morning. And thus the heart of the mourner—unless when darkened by remorse—awakes from its stupor of grief, and finds that there is much pleasure still to be found even in the ordinary events of life. It may be that the storm has blighted the first buds of happiness, but a merciful Providence permits new and unexpected blossoms to spring up around us, “till the tide of our grief is done.”

Ellen could not believe in this second change ; but her unbelief did not interfere with the course of nature,—the mercies of the Almighty. Already a gleam of sunshine was opening for her, even now, in a visit from Mary Beaumont.

A note came from her, offering to spend a day at Penmorfa. Mrs. Floyd entreated that the one day should be extended to two or three ; and Ellen was astonished by her expressions of wonder, as well as of pleasure, when she found her request was complied with.

“I thought,” she said, rather languidly, “that the Veres were always friends as well as relations of our family.”

Mrs. Floyd looked at her keenly. “They are,” she said, with some meaning ; “and yet it is the first time I have been able to persuade Mary to spend a night under my roof since—since her brother Robert’s death.”

“He died at Penmorfa, did he not ?”

Again that questioning look from Mrs. Floyd, and another short pause, before she answered, “He did.”

“What caused his death ?” Ellen scarcely knew what tempted her to be so inquisitive about Sir Robert Vere. He had died before she was born, and curiosity was not one of her usual failings ; but a vague impression of having somewhere heard his death alluded to as one with which some story was connected, induced her to make the inquiry.

Mrs. Floyd did not at first answer her question. When it was repeated she said, simply, “A fall,” and hastily quitted the room.

“There is evidently something painful connected with

Sir Robert's death," Ellen languidly thought, as the door closed behind Mrs. Floyd ; and as she idly wondered what it was, there came over her memory a faint remembrance of having, when quite a child, got into disgrace with her old Scotch nurse—who had nursed her mother as well as herself—because she delighted, as the twilight came on, to stray into a walk called the Dark Walk, old Jenny giving as the reason of her disapproval of her proceedings, that "Sir Robert walked there." This answer had always made her shiver with a kind of ghostly fear ; but she had never been able to get a distinct explanation of who Sir Robert was, or why he should "walk." She now understood that he must be Sir Robert Vere ; but the cause of his death was still unexplained. That dark walk was no unlikely place for the scene of a ghost story, hedged in on either side by high hedges, and overhung by dark yews and other churchyard trees. On one side the hill rose abruptly towards the terraced esplanade on which the house was built, on the other descended precipitously towards the river, which rolled some hundred feet beneath, and whose waters had in some places undermined the friable stone of which the hill of Penmorfa was composed, bringing with the *débris* one or two of the splendid old beeches which had rooted themselves into the easily-perforated rock. She fancied she had heard that, some twenty years ago, there was no fence between the Dark Walk and the precipice ; if so, it must indeed have been a perilous place, and nothing could be more likely than that Sir Robert should fall over and be killed ; and yet grandmamma's odd look when she asked about it seemed to imply—— But why waste her time in useless conjectures ? What did it signify to her how it happened, except that it had been a cause of sorrow to her dear Mrs. Beaumont.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PENMORFA.

"I cannot but remember such things were;
That were most precious to me."

SHAKSPEARE.

MRS. BEAUMONT'S visit was of the greatest possible use to both her friends. Her bright cheerfulness gave Mrs. Floyd a delight she could not help showing; and again and again she thanked her for coming.

"I would have done so long ere this, grannie," she said, with a pleasant smile; "but my husband and children do not like to part with me long, and——" She paused.

"You could not bear to recall the past, Mary?" said the old lady, sadly. "I do not wonder."

"Oh! no; it was not that," she answered, hastily; "but that I did not think you really required me till now; nor do you yet;" she added, hastily, as she saw a slight frown on Mrs. Floyd's face; "but I think Ellen does. I want to persuade her that she is stronger than she fancies."

"That you will not easily do, I fear."

But the very next morning she told Ellen that she wished to visit old Jenny Brown, the nurse, of whom mention has already been made, and that she wished her to go so far with her. Ellen hesitated, for Jenny's cottage was full half a mile from Penmorfa; but cousin Mary's encouraging smile, and the temptation of a walk with her, led her to make the exertion. It was a bright, breezy morning in the end of April, and the sweet spring sights and sounds had a most exhilarating effect on her spirits. Their way lay along a broad avenue of lofty trees, skirted on one side by the garden, sloping to the river, on the other by the steep hill-side. Emerging from this, they came out on a sunny lane, already fringed with ferns and brambles, which, with the flowers of the blackthorn, the young fresh leaves of the whitethorn, the exquisite wreaths of glistening ivy, mingled oddly but beautifully with the delicate loveliness of the wood anemone,

the bunches of purple and white violets, and the huge tufts of primroses that gleamed out from the sheltered nooks.

"What nosegays of spring flowers your mother, my brothers, and I used to gather here long ago," Mrs. Beaumont said, as she stooped to pluck some of the fragrant white violets; "I have often thought since that in all my wanderings, far and near, I never saw so many or such varied wild flowers as there are here, nor a fairer landscape. Look, Ellen! See how lovingly the sun plays on the waters close to Pentirbach! That little point used in our childish fancies to be the haunt of the water spirits and good people. Do you remember the opening description in 'Undine,' of the fisherman's cottage, built on the gentle slope of a meadow, whose miniature cape jutted into the clear waters of the lake which clasped it in a soft embrace? Is not Pentirbach the very realization of that scene? See how the waters kiss the golden sands, and lave the roots of the grass and trees!—and how grandly the river sweeps round there towards Trefriew, winding and twisting among the hills; and those ranges of mountains in the far distance, how clearly they stand out against each other, cutting so sharply against the pure, bright sky. Thank God, dear Ellen, that you are in so fair a country; constant association with a nature so beautiful *must* be beneficial to you."

Ellen looked up languidly. Perhaps she thought that the scene before her only mocked her by its very loveliness; but, ashamed of confessing her weakness, she merely answered, "It is beautiful! but sometimes, Mary, I am too tired to care for anything—even for this."

"You do look tired, love; so you shall wait for me here, and I will go on alone to Jenny's."

"I ought to go; I have not been there since my return."

Mrs. Beaumont said nothing more; but, drawing her arm within her own, walked on in silence; rightly judging that at present her own raptures grated upon her companion's nerves.

The old nurse was all delight, all bustle to welcome them. She carefully dusted her spotlessly white wooden chairs as she drew them close to the fire for their use. She opened her little aumrie, and brought out her carefully hoarded cups and saucers to make them "a wee dish of tea,"—for she had

neither wine nor spirits to offer them ; “for, you see,” she added, with a little laugh, “they are as fond of such things here as in auld Scotland, and I did not think it bescemed me, that had been nurse to two generations of the Penmorfa family, to encourage the taste ; and that is why I have only tea to offer you, young ladies.”

Mrs. Beaumont assured her there was nothing she liked better, and she was sure it would do Miss Egerton a great deal of good after her walk—the first long walk she had taken since her return.

“Ah, darling,” said old Jenny, carefully unfastening Ellen’s bonnet, and looking lovingly in her face, “it was a kind thought of you to bring Miss Mary here ; it is long, long since my een have been brightened by a sight of her.”

Ellen blushed. “It was Mrs. Beaumont brought me, Jenny, not I her,” she said honestly.

The old woman smiled. “Awell,” she said, “settle it between you ; so as I see you both, it matters little which brought the other. But you look weary, my pet ; will you not move to the big chair there by the window ? Ay, that’ll rest you better. Do you mind, Miss Ellen, who gave me that chair—the year I had the fever, you know, and was so long ailin’ ? Yes, just Mr. Reginald. He was a kind laddie that, and they tell me he is married. When will you be following so good an example, Miss Ellen ?”

Busily went old Jenny’s tongue as she laid out her little round table, covering it with an ancient damask napkin, as white as snow, though carefully darned, and cutting those thickly buttered slices of bread which used to be the delight of their nursery tea-table ; and when presiding at the tea-board, her tongue went faster still, going back to the former generation, when Miss Julia (Ellen’s mother) and the young Veres had been much together. “You and Mr. Frank,” addressing Mrs. Beaumont, “were the babies then ; and Mr. Robert, and poor Miss Gertrude and Miss Julia, the elder children. Ay, ay, you were merry bairns : little did I think that old Jenny would see the three she loved so well dressed in their grave-clothes, and least of all that dear Sir Robert had so short and sore a day’s darg to do. Alack, alack, that that should be the fate of one so true, so good, so loving !” Then, turning abruptly to Ellen, she said, “Thank Heaven,

darling, that you were spared the curse of a passionate spirit like your father's !"

Ellen looked at her in blank amazement. "What do you mean, Jenny?" she said with a slight shudder.

She seemed suddenly to recollect herself, and said, with a forced laugh, "'Deed, dear, it would be ill to explain what a silly old woman means at times. What was I thinking or saying, Miss Mary?" she added, turning to her. "I feel whiles as if my thoughts wandered a bit. You see I am getting on in years ; but——" and she whispered a few words in Mrs. Beaumont's ear.

"Jenny thinks you look ill, Ellen dear," said the latter in a cheerful voice. "You must come to her sometimes, and show her that the air of Penmorfa will soon bring back your roses."

"Yes," said the old woman, "that would comfort me rarely; and I would like to hear something, too, of Mr. Reginald, and what kind of wife he has got."

"We must not begin that subject to-day, Jenny," Mrs. Beaumont said, "or Mrs. Floyd will fancy we are lost ; but I promise you that Ellen shall come some day and let you hear all about it."

"How could you make that promise for me, Mary?" Ellen said, as they quitted the cottage.

"Because I think it would do you good to fulfil it. Believe me, my dear Ellen, it is a very dangerous indulgence to brood silently over any subject. It is far better to speak of it bravely, especially to indifferent people."

"Oh no, no, Mary !"

Mrs. Beaumont hesitated a moment before she said, "Well then, Ellen, can you open your heart to me? Frank has told me a good deal. Will you tell me the rest?"

There could but be one answer to such a question. They seated themselves in a sheltered nook on the hill-side, where the sweet scenes spread out at their feet—the pungent perfume of the golden furze, the soft bleating of the young lambs—formed a lovely *entourage* for the strange, sad story.

Mary listened attentively, and Ellen poured out her whole heart to her. Hours rolled on, the unflagging sun pursued his westward pilgrimage, the shadows became longer, a crimson tint stole over the landscape, and the rays of the setting

sun flashed back from the windows of the little fishing-village that lay on the opposite side of the river, and glistened on the broad, bright sands left uncovered by the falling tide, before the two friends rose to return to Penmorfa. But a weight was removed from Ellen's heart. Mary had felt for her, and for him also; had approved of her conduct throughout; had not even blamed the weakness which had yielded to Terese's wish to correspond with her; and, best of all, she had gently and delicately urged upon her the religious duty of struggling against the indolent indulgence of her vain regrets, and had promised to aid her in the endeavour.

"I must persuade dear grannie," as she often affectionately called Mrs. Floyd, "to part with you to me for a little time, and I prophesy that you will return to Penmorfa another creature."

Ellen shook her head. She doubted whether anything could now rouse her from the miserable apathy which had stolen over her. However, she made no objections, and a fortnight's residence at Beaumont Lodge showed that 'cousin Mary' understood human nature better than Ellen did. She returned to Penmorfa with new thoughts, new hopes, new resolutions; and though yet far from restored to her girlish light-heartedness, she had overcome the first bitterness of her grief; had learned to believe that life was not quite a desert, although deprived of some of the first blossoms of hope, and that God's mercy may bring joy out of the heaviest grief, if we will but receive his chastisement in a true and Christian spirit.

A few visits to the cottages of the poor had proved to her that she had no monopoly of suffering, but that others had gone through even more fiery ordeals, and had come forth from them purified by the flames; and they had likewise taught her to seek to forget her own sorrows in soothing those of others,—to "trust God, and do good."

With this simple rule of action,—with more humble ideas of herself, and a more earnest desire to fulfil the duties of her present life, she returned to Penmorfa greatly improved in health and spirits. But religion cannot be learned in a day; nor can all difficulties in life be smoothed away even by kindly hands. One remained which was of her own

rearing,—the steadfast determination to conceal the secret of her heart from Mrs. Floyd.

"It would only vex her," she said, when Mrs. Beaumont entreated her to be frank with her grandmother; "and, besides, I could not do it without committing him, and he did not wish she should know it."

Her friend shook her head gravely. "My dear Ellen, I think you make a great mistake in this matter. I never yet knew of a case where want of frankness to those who have a right to our confidence, did not bring suffering, sooner or later. But I cannot force you to follow my advice. You, like others, my poor child, must, I fear, buy your own experience."

Ellen smiled faintly. "I trust not, dear Mary—experience is so hard a master; and what can happen to make my want of confidence of any moment? *You* know all; is not that enough?"

"I wish, rather than expect, that it may be so."

Ellen felt uncomfortable at this answer, but her dread of inculcating Reginald made her hold to her resolution. The result was that the consciousness of having a secret from Mrs. Floyd induced a habit of reserve totally foreign to her natural disposition, which led her to shut up all her thoughts and feelings in her own breast; thus increasing their intensity, and producing an effect upon her character which was the cause of much after-suffering.

That year rolled slowly away. Ellen's health became re-established, but in other respects she was but little altered from what she had been a twelvemonth before. Her mind, it is true, was not so entirely engrossed by one prevailing thought; she allowed new interests to take some hold of her, but they were minor ones. Her life was too monotonous to take her out of herself, and while she was conscious that it would be alike wrong and foolish to return to Heddlesham so long as the 20th were there, she found it as difficult to chain down her interests to the uneventful present, as it was for Pegasus to bend his haughty neck to the yoke of the plough. Spite of her best resolves, a sound, a word, the perfume of a flower, carried her back to Egerton Park. The brilliant *fêtes* of last year flitted before her eyes, the lights of the ball-room shut out the summer sunshine from her eyes, the sounds of military music in her ears drowned the sweet

singing of the jocund lark and tuneful blackbird, and her foolish heart throbbed far too thick and fast to be in keeping with the changeless tranquillity of Penmorfa.

Her greatest excitement was news from Heddlesham, and her life felt very empty if a week elapsed without a letter from Judith Dashwood, little Kate, or Terese Stanhope. Mrs. Egerton seldom wrote, and Ellen scarcely regretted the infrequency of her letters; for their tone was so gossiping, scandalous, and foolish, that it grated upon her feelings to think of her stepmother in so degrading a light; but Judith wrote very happily. What had been long surmised had come to pass at last: Major Hazlewood had returned after long leave, convinced that he could not live without her; and so they were engaged, and were to be married as soon as he could make arrangements to leave the army and settle as a gentleman farmer at Warneford.

"You must not forget your promise to be my bridesmaid," Judith wrote. "Both Charles and I wish it so much, and you would delight to see how very happy our old friend is, and how fond Harry and my mother are of Charles. There is not a single cloud on my future. All Charles's friends seem pleased at his engagement, and his mother, Lady Warneford, writes very, very kindly."

A letter from Mrs. Egerton about the same time was full of Judith's marriage; but at the end she added that the 20th were ordered to Cork. Everybody was sorry to part with them; they had been so very long at Heddlesham it seemed unnatural to have them go away at all. For herself, she was quite in low spirits. She was certain she never could like the Lancers as she had liked the 20th. And she heard—could Ellen believe it?—that Colonel Wyndham was engaged to Mildred Trevillian. She hoped for his sake it was not true; for if ever there was a termagant in this world, it was Mildred Trevillian. But evidently the marrying mania was very strong at present. People said Louisa Manners was engaged; but that was too much to believe. However, it made everybody very stupid, she thought. The colonel was constantly at the Trevillians'. Major Hazlewood and Judith were like two turtledoves; and though she could not say the same of the Stanhopes,—for she never now went out of an evening, and he dined regularly at mess,—still he

was grown more of a bookworm than before they became acquainted ; and one felt half sorry for the poor little woman, she looked so ill and so intensely miserable. Nevertheless it was bad taste in her to show what a martyr she was. The only one of the 20th who continued as he was, was Spencer. He was as gay and rattling and amusing as ever.

Ellen closed the letter with a sigh. From what little Kate had said, she had feared Terese was either ill or unhappy ; and the next letter she received from herself confirmed this impression.

"My poor husband," she wrote, "has been very far from well of late, and I have been anxious ; he overworks himself sadly, but I cannot interfere. I feel that *I* can do little to cheer him, and so I let him do what he thinks is right. Would to Heaven I could make him happier ! but my very love for him seems to prevent me from showing it. The Germans say that very deep affection is very quiet. Do you not believe that this is true ? *I* do. We go to Ireland immediately. I cannot tell you how nervous I feel at returning thither. They told us we were ordered to India ; —I believed and wished that. In a distant country, estranged from all former associations, I dreamed we might be all in all to each other ; but in Ireland ! Ah me ; would it was not thither we were to go. My husband sometimes speaks as if he intended to leave the army. I wish he would ; and yet even that I fear, so I say nothing but wait and hope."

This intelligence was not very cheering—that which followed was less so. Terese reached Ireland very ill. There was bad news from India,—Government was called upon to send out more troops without delay, and as cavalry were especially wanted, the 20th was ordered off at once. In such circumstances it was impossible for either Hazlewood or Stanhope to sell out : so the one hurried on his marriage, and embarked with his wife at once ; the other was forced at the last moment to leave his behind him, to follow as soon as her strength would permit.

CHAPTER XXX.

NEWS FROM IRELAND.

"I do repent me now—too late—of each impatient thought,
That would not let me tarry out God's leisure as I ought.
I've been too hasty, peevish, proud,—I long'd to go away ;
And now I'd fain live on for thee, God will not let me stay."

CAROLINE BOWLES.

THE second year of Ellen's stay at Penmorfa brought her new and more onerous duties. She had long suspected that her grandmother's memory was failing her ; but a time came when it was no longer possible to conceal from herself that the once strong, active woman was sinking into her dotage.

Of this Mrs. Floyd was herself quite unconscious. She still directed everything and everybody, and resented with asperity any hint that she was less able than formerly to fulfil all her duties ; but both servants and workpeople came secretly to Ellen to have her grandmother's contradictory orders made clear, or the difficulties removed which had been raised by the growing irritability of her once kind, though rather overbearing, disposition.

It fell on her also to remind the old lady of neglected duties, as if they had been accidentally omitted, or, more commonly still, to fulfil them unobserved.

This was, in some measure, of use to Ellen, by forcing her into a certain reliance on her own judgment and habit of action ; but it was hurtful in strengthening the power of concealing her real feelings, which was already becoming a prominent failing in her character. Nor could it be beneficial to so young a girl to spend her whole time between the rectifying of her grandmother's errors and the reading to her the old books of controversial divinity in which she delighted.

The only excitements of her life were a rapid canter across the hills on some charitable visit, or the society of Mr. Jones, the clergyman of the parish, of whom Judith had once spoken so disrespectfully ; of his old-maidish wife, and more frequently that of kind Dr. Black, who was constant in his

friendly visits to Penmorfa ; all of whom had known her from childhood, and loved her dearly. But there were times when, thoroughly exhausted by over-fatigue and anxiety, she longed to escape from her mill-horse round of duties for the pleasant variety of society at Egerton Park, and enjoy, were it but for a moment, the delight of listening to her father's sweet voice and intellectual conversation. She had, however, self-denial to resist this temptation when offered to her, though it was difficult to refuse Mr. Egerton's wish to have his dear Ellen home again ; but her stepmother's reasons for desiring her return were more easily withstood.

"I am very sorry, dear Ellen, that you are still inclined to a hermit life," she wrote. "Now that Kate is gone to school, I have no one to accompany me on my drives and visits, and your father is getting really too provokingly indolent. Nothing I can say will persuade him to invite the officers of the Lancers to the Park ; and yet they are the very most charming set of military who have been quartered at Heddlesham within my recollection. They are going to give a fancy ball at barracks,—a very different sort of thing from Colonel Wyndham's. Do you remember what a tame affair that was? Colonel Lefroy (Lord Nesley's eldest son) does everything in first-rate style. They are to have Gunter down, and Colli-net's band, and everybody is wild to go. They have sent us tickets, but Granville wishes me to decline. I am sure, if you were here, he would not be so barbarous. Do persuade Mrs. Floyd to get well and let you come. We are to have archery meetings this spring at Manuers Manor. But I must stop. The band plays on the green at three o'clock. I must be there. Adieu.—Your very affectionate

"CHARLOTTE EGERTON.

"By the way, they heard from Judith from the Cape—all well."

Ellen threw down the letter in disgust. How could Mrs. Egerton suppose that she could be tempted to Heddlesham by a lancer regiment commanded by a baron's son? Was it possible that she herself could really enjoy such girlish pleasures still, or could forget so easily all their friends in the 20th? So they had heard from the Cape? She wished her stepmother had said more about Judith's letter,—she should have liked some particulars ; and then she began to

remember that it was a long, long time since she had heard from Terese? Had she no letters from the Cape? As this thought passed through her mind a little note was given her, which, from the smallness of its size, had been overlooked at the post-office. It was from Mrs. Stanhope;—such a happy note! She was the living mother of a living child, and her rapturous descriptions of her baby were followed by still more rapturous delight at the kind, affectionate letter she had received from her husband:—

“He says I may soon come to him—as soon as I am strong enough. Oh, that thought will make me strong indeed! But first I must bring my little treasure to show you; I am sure you will love it for its father’s sake and for mine. It is already so like him. I mean to call it Evelyn, after his mother. Am not I right? And will not you be one of its godmothers? I should so like to have it christened at Penmorfa church! Would Mrs. Floyd think it very odd of me to wish it? Would she be angry if I brought Reginald’s child that you might see it?”

Ellen showed the touching, natural letter to her grandmother. It affected her deeply.

“Bid her come to us,” she said, with tears in her old eyes; “tell her that I loved Reginald’s mother with all my heart, and that I love her for calling the babe after my dear Evelyn.”

The message was sent; and, at Mrs. Floyd’s repeated suggestion, every preparation was made for the reception of the mother and child. The old lady forgot many things now, but she never forgot to inquire, morning after morning, when she might hope to see little Evelyn Stanhope. A fortnight passed, however, and they heard nothing more of her; another, and Mrs. Floyd impatiently declared that Ellen’s letter must have miscarried; she must write again. She did so; but again no answer. Mrs. Floyd got first anxious, then annoyed, then angry, and then forgot all about it. Ellen did not forget, but she knew not where to turn to have her anxiety relieved. Had Judith been at Heddlesham, she would have asked her to make the necessary inquiries; but Mrs. Egerton evidently knew nothing, or she would long ago have told her about it.

At length news did come. Mrs. Egerton, after a silence

of some weeks, wrote to tell Ellen that she had persuaded her husband to go abroad for a time. He required rousing, she said; and as for herself, she was far from strong; her nervous system was quite low, and nothing but change could do her good. Everybody said, moreover, that at Kate's age (she was only twelve!) a year or two on the Continent would be of immense advantage. They thought of going in July, when Kate's holidays commenced. Mr. Egerton wished her to persuade Ellen to join them, but she knew her too well to expect such a thing; she *would* hold to her duty, whatever that was, "dear good Ellen!" And then she branched off into animadversions upon the Lancers, in whom she had now lost all interest; indeed, she never had cared much for them; and since they had joined Lord de Rochfort's set they never associated with any but "fast" people;—she began almost to regret the 20th. By the way, had she told Ellen that Mildred Trevillian had taken the crooked stick, after all, and had accepted poor Sir Edmund Manners, whom the Lancers had nicknamed "The Rejected Addresses."—Was it not wicked? However, she must stop gossiping at present, she had so many things to do in preparation for their departure.

Ellen closed the letter with a sigh. She should have dearly liked to go abroad with her father! As she slipped the note into the envelope, she observed a few hastily-scribbled words:—"I forgot to tell you in my last that poor little Mrs. Stanhope is dead. I believe it is true, as I heard it from Edith M'Lean. It startled me at first; but I dare say Reginald will get over it, she was such a pining, delicate little thing."

The letter dropped from Ellen's fingers.

"Dead! Terese dead!—impossible!" She thought of her dawning hopes—of her delight in her child—of her pleasure at the thought that Reginald would welcome the fair little being she longed to carry to him to brighten their home in the far East. Oh, no, she could not have died so soon! just when the dark clouds seemed passing away from her sky; just as she was beginning to believe that she had at last gained the inestimable treasure of her husband's love.

She looked at the last letter she had received from her; there was no trace of mortal weakness in those even lines,—

that delicate penmanship ;—life and hope seemed to fill her whole heart. Could she be dead ? Could there not be some mistake ? The child, perhaps !—an infant's life hung by so slender a thread ! Evelyn might be gone ; but she hoped—yes, thank God ! she hoped with all her heart and soul that Terese still lived.

She would write to Mrs. Dashwood—to Edith M'Lean—to find out more particulars for her ; she would not believe such a thing on hearsay. But before she could fulfil her intentions, a packet reached her, bearing the Irish postmark. It was impossible not to recognize Terese's handwriting ; but so tremulous, so different from the clear, regular Italian hand to which she was accustomed, that she could not feel surprised that the direction was scarcely legible, and that it had travelled all over England and Wales before reaching her. But at least she was alive, that was something.

That hope was soon quenched ; for the inner envelope, containing several sheets of closely-written manuscript, bore the ominous inscription :—"To be sent immediately on my death." The paper nearly escaped her trembling fingers ; but on recovering herself Ellen read as follows :—

"MY DEAR AND ONLY FRIEND,—Willingly, most willingly, should I have come to you—have enjoyed the rapture of giving my darling into your arms—of hearing you say she was like him we both love so well ; but that hope is past ; when my Evelyn comes to you she will be motherless !

"My dream of life is over ! Eternity opens her portals in the far distance, and earth seems narrowing to my sight ! and yet some worldly thoughts linger still—my child, my husband, and my friend are much in my thoughts—I would make them happy if I could, but I cannot do much. I can only beseech you to give some little time and thought to poor baby's welfare. Mrs. Blake is very faithful and trustworthy, but my Evelyn will be, for a time at least, doubly an orphan. Till you hear from Captain Stanhope, I pray you to let her live somewhere near you, and to look after her a little for my sake, as well as his. I can write no more, but to ask you, when you read the inclosed paper, to remember that I knew that neither it nor this could reach you till the hand that had written it was mouldering in the

dust. I thought you ought to know the truth. God forgive me if I have judged unwisely ! and do you believe I acted to the best of my poor ability.

"Your friendship has been one of the brightest parts of my married life. Never forget this, dear friend,—never forget that Terese loved you very dearly. Teach my child her mother's name, and how she loved her sweet baby, and now farewell. You, sweet Ellen, will be remembered in the dying prayers of your poor

"TERESE."

The inclosed paper was as follows :—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have learned something to-day which I never knew before ; and as there is a feeling in my mind that I shall not live long, I must write to tell you what it is ; for I think you ought to know it. I have confided my early history to you ; I must also confide the end of all.

"You know that on my marriage to Captain Stanhope my earnest, my very humble hope was to make his home pleasant to him. I did not expect—I did not wish for—any passionate attachment on his part, for I felt I could not return it. But I did look for happiness of a tranquil kind. I esteemed him thoroughly. He had always been steadily and consistently kind to me, and I loved him as much as I could love any living thing. A few weeks of married life, however, showed me that we were not suited to make each other happy. I believe I was most in fault. I did not study his disposition as I ought to have done ; my own thoughts engrossed me too much ; I forgot the present in the past : but my punishment was very heavy. I did love him dearly, but I could not show it ; the ghost of my lost love seemed to rise between us whenever I was tempted to express my affection, and I retreated into myself. My coldness reacted on him. Our dispositions were at once too much and too little alike to assimilate ; and there were other causes, too trivial to mention, which tended to our gradual estrangement. There was no quarrel,—nothing but a sense of isolation, which each felt, and neither acknowledged. And yet our parting was very bitter. But my hopes for the future then rested on my dear baby. I contrived to persuade myself that our child would become a strong bond of union between us ; that the love he must feel for her would one day teach him

to love her mother also. It was a timid hope, but a strong one, until I learned—what I must tell you.

“Do not think I blame him; oh no, I pity him, and blame myself for not understanding it all sooner. Experience has taught me that our strongest affections are not altogether under our own control;—they may be governed, but they cannot be completely altered. You may change the course of a little brook, but if you attempt to dam up the wide ocean, the dike must be strong indeed; and even then the waves fret and chafe against the bulwark, and too often overthrow it entirely.

“Thank God my dear husband made the dike of his strong will so great, that I never knew till to-day how terrible had been his conflict between love and duty:—duty had always prevailed. He had treated me with never-failing gentleness and consideration—he had studied my every wish—had overlooked my weakness and irritability—had watched over me with unwearyed tenderness; and when forced to leave me, had made every possible arrangement for my comfort, and yet he did not—he never had loved me! A mere accident has to-day revealed to me this truth, which he guarded from me so carefully; and which no word, nor look, nor deed of his had ever betrayed.

“In the hurry of the last sudden parting he had allowed me to help him in his preparations. Many books and papers were to be divided and arranged. Some he took with him, others he begged me to look over at my leisure, and select such as I thought he would care to have sent after him. I was gratified by his confidence in me, but till to-day I was too weak to comply with his wishes. I began my task very happily,—it was such a new pleasure to work for him; and among the first things I fell upon was a pocket-book, dated the year of our marriage. I opened it. Perhaps I ought not to have done so, but I thought I might; and I was curious to know whether my name was often mentioned in it. The first nine months contained only a record of his engagements, and of memoranda of which I could make nothing; but I was struck by the constant recurrence of the initials ‘E. E.’, as if in connection with each day’s interests and occupations. This puzzled me. I could make nothing of it, and turning to the date of our marriage, I was mortified

to find it a blank. A little startled by this neglect, I looked to the day when he had arrived at Newcastle and had a long interview with my aunt. It too was blank; but on that on which our marriage was decided to be immediate, I found, in almost illegible characters, these ominous words,—‘*Perduto, e per sempre*,’ and a little further on,—‘*Nessun maggior dolore ch  ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria.*’ In the inner pocket was a lock of bright chestnut hair—a child’s hair, with the old initials, ‘E. E.,’ and the date 1817, and a little note from you, congratulating him on his marriage.

“I felt these things were not kept by accident, and then understood to whom the letters E. E. referred. I also remembered a little incident that had occurred after our first visit to Egerton Park. I had expressed very warmly how much I desired to have you for my friend, and he exclaimed, ‘If you succeed in that, dear Terese,’—it was very seldom he called me that,—‘you will never repent it. If there is an angel on earth, it is Ellen Egerton.’ I remembered the look of his eyes, the eager tone of his voice, the crushing pressure of his fingers, as he caught my hand in his, and that my foolish heart had beat fast with pleasure that I had found *one* point where we could feel alike! Alas! I never till now guessed how strangely like, how strangely dissimilar, were our feelings.

“This discovery gave me a great shock,—I believe I fainted; at all events, I remember nothing that happened for some hours. When I came to myself, my first act was to scal up the pocket-book carefully, and inclose it to him with a few explanatory lines, telling him how I came to read it, and what I desired him to do in consequence. I hope he will fulfil my wishes; and now I write to you to beseech you, my dear friend, to aid him in fulfilling my wishes if it be possible for you to do so.

“And now, may God bless and prosper you! We may never meet again,—never at least if you have read this; and therefore I must tell you that next to my husband and child there is no one on earth I love as I do you. I cannot tell why, unless it is that *he* loves you. Farewell, dearest Ellen, and believe me, in life and death, most heartily yours,

“TERESE BLANCHE STANHOPE.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHIPWRECK.

"But, see! in confluence borne before the blast,
Clouds roll'd on clouds, the dusky noon o'ercast;
The blackening ocean curls, the winds arise,
And the dark scud in swift succession flies."

FALCONER'S SHIPWRECK.

MORE allegorical meaning lies hidden under the old Arabian fable of the prince half marble, half man, than is at first apparent. There are moments in the lives of all of us in which we have been subject to a like enchantment. A spell seems turning us to stone, save in the one overpowering sense of mental pain—pain from which we cannot escape, and which is only rendered the more acute by our utter powerlessness to struggle against it. Such was Ellen's state on perusing the sad records of poor Terese's last and heaviest life-trial. She suffered acutely from its perusal—she felt herself the innocent cause of all—she pictured what her own feelings would have been had she, like Terese, opened that fatal pocket-book, and seen there the cause of her husband's indifference.

There was a time when she had felt gratified to learn from Reginald that he still retained that lock of her hair he had cut off when he went to Oxford. But that time was past; she only considered it now in reference to the misery such a memorial had inflicted on Terese. As regarded herself, she was as utterly indifferent to its preservation as if her heart were made of ice. The spell was over her,—she was petrified to marble, save in the one sense of suffering;—a stone seemed rolled to the door of her heart, which she had not strength to remove.

This trance continued for a long, long time. When she roused herself from it, it was to think of the child. Why had it not come? Most certainly Mrs. Floyd would receive it at Penmorfa for a time, and by-and-by she could think of its future. Poor little darling! Yes, indeed, she should love it for its mother's sake.

It was no longer so easy as it had been to awaken Mrs. Floyd's interest in little Evelyn ; but it was roused to a certain extent,—so far, at least, that she begged Ellen to write at once and have it brought to Penmorfa, and then sent for the housekeeper to give her most particular directions to have fires lighted in the old nursery, and to have every preparation made to receive her.

Ay, write at once ; but where ? Ellen carefully examined the postmark of the last letter. It had been sent and mis-sent to so many places that one stamp had almost obliterated another ; but it was certain that the name of the town from whence Terese's letters had been dated after Reginald's departure was not among them. However, she wrote to the postmaster there. The answer returned was that the ladies she inquired about—Mrs. Stanhope and Mrs. Blake—had lived at a small cottage in the neighbourhood for a few months, but had left some time before without leaving an address. She sent next to Edith M'Lean. Her information had been received from Mrs. Markham, who still lived in the neighbourhood of Newcastle ; but who, not having been on friendly terms with her niece since her marriage, had only received a formal intimation of her death, without any particulars. She believed the letter had come from Dublin, but was not sure.

All other inquiries were equally fruitless. At Mrs. Beaumont's suggestion, Sir Francis Vere went over to Ireland, and endeavoured to trace out the lost child, but in vain. All who know the Irish character will understand how, with the very best will in the world to assist his search, it was made only the more difficult by the eagerness of the country people to help him. Many a nurse and child was tracked out, many a Mrs. Blake examined, but without success. It seemed as if the earth had swallowed them up, and left no sign. So nothing remained save to inquire of Reginald himself where Evelyn had taken refuge, and what was to be done for her. Mrs. Beaumont undertook to write in her own and Ellen's name, offering between them to watch over the little creature till he could come and claim her.

And this seemed the end of all ;—when the short-lived excitement was over, everything at Penmorfa resumed its normal state. Ellen's daily duties were unaltered, the same

monotony reigned over all, and no one, not even Ellen herself, suspected that beneath her placid exterior thoughts and feelings long crushed under the iron heel of duty were springing up again into vigorous life. How easily a smouldering fire is fanned into a flame! That touching letter from Terese which Ellen believed had only taught her to regret that Reginald had so long retained his affection to herself undiminished, had produced a very different effect. In the depths of her heart—depths she never trusted herself to fathom—the conviction was gradually shaping itself into form—"There is now no obstacle between us." He had erred in loving her too well; he had endeavoured, perhaps too little, to struggle against his feelings; but what was once a duty was so no longer.

She never indulged herself in speaking of Reginald, even to Mary Beaumont or old Jenny; but (she was not conscious how significant the doing such a thing was) she replaced in its old position the little ship he had made for her when she was a child, and which till last year had been the ornament of her own pretty sitting-room. She took from her closed portfolio the drawings he had sent her on her eighteenth birthday, and allowed them to lie on her table, and wore again the diamond talisman ring which she had never had courage to put on after she heard of his marriage.

These were trifling acts; but a straw shows the force and direction of the current. Nor was this all. She could contrive, by dint of careful watching, to keep her thoughts under due control in the presence of others, and in the broad daylight; but sitting alone in the long twilight evenings, when Mrs. Floyd was asleep, and all around her was still as the grave, her fancy wafted her far away to the banks of the Ganges, and her heart bled for him as she thought of his loneliness, his desolation, when the sad news reached him. How he must yearn for a single word of sympathy,—how earnestly desire to clasp in his arms the fair, fragile blossom, all that remained to him of poor Terese! If Ellen regretted so deeply the finding of that pocket-book, what grief, what remorse must be his! How impossible it must be for him not to feel that he had, however unintentionally, accelerated his wife's sad fate.

She tried to force her thoughts into different channels;

but what woman who has once loved, once flattered herself that she could understand the working of a man's mind, could fail to dwell on his sorrows and loneliness, or to indulge the eager longing to comfort him in his affliction?

After such waking dreams, it was natural that she should in her sleep fancy these dreams fulfilled, should believe she was near him, was pouring the balm of womanly sympathy into his heart, whispering to him that a brighter future might come, even yet; that a home might still be found for him in England, where, in its calm pleasures, enlivened by the gambols of his child, he would forget the past!

It is a trite saying, that while we fold our hands Time folds not his wings. The spring and summer passed once again. Mr. and Mrs. Egerton and Kate were still abroad; Mrs. Floyd became weaker and weaker, intellectually and physically; and Ellen, spite of her strenuous exertions, looked and felt worn and exhausted. When her twenty-first birthday arrived, no one could have believed, in looking at her, that she was so young. It is events more than years that leave the marks of age on the human countenance; and often these events are unseen by the world, unsuspected even by those nearest and dearest to us. Like the blight which passes in a single night over a certain district, it is the effect that is visible, not the cause. We rise up fresh as the lark, full of life and hope; we lie down worn and old; and yet those around us are unconscious that a word, a look, or tone has shattered our whole existence.

Ellen's hopes, however, were not shattered; on the contrary, she was, although unconsciously, nursing them into life; but as time passed, and they were long deferred, her heart grew faint within her, and her cheek wan, though those around her, unaware of the secret influence at work, attributed the change to over-anxiety and exertion in Mrs. Floyd's behalf.

Autumn came,—a dreary, miserable autumn,—succeeded by a winter of unprecedented severity. Snow, which seldom lies in that sheltered district, had for days partially blocked up the high roads, and made the cross-roads impassable. The cold was intense; and constant rumours of shipwrecks on the exposed coast of South Wales found their way to Conway, and travelled thence to Penmorfa. The end of December ushered in a storm of unusual violence; and the

effect produced on Mrs. Floyd by the state of the weather was most alarming.

Ellen, seeing her gradually growing weaker, wrote to her father, to entreat him to come to Penmorfa as soon as possible, and meanwhile devoted herself entirely to the endeavour to rouse her from the state of torpor into which she was sinking.

Her only comfort was the almost daily visits of Mr. Jones, and the little doctor of the neighbourhood, a very skilful and kind-hearted, though not very gentlemanly practitioner.

Christmas passed in watching and anxiety. The few days that followed seemed to bring a slight change for the better ; but on the first of the new year there was a relapse which seemed to threaten a speedy ending to her anxieties ; and, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, Ellen was forced to send a messenger to demand Dr. Black's instant attendance.

It was a miserable day ; the snow-storm had been followed by a cutting north wind, which cleared the exposed parts of the hills, while in the sheltered valleys the snow lay heaped in heavy drifts. Flitting showers of hail swept across the country, effacing all the usual features, and leaving nothing visible save the hazy outlines of the hills, and the muddy current of the river, sweeping onward to the sea. Everything was so dreary and desolate within and without the house, that it was an inexpressible relief to Ellen when she espied the squat figure of the little doctor, wrapped in his huge peajacket, and mounted on his rough red pony, picking his way carefully down the still slippery avenue. The sight of any living being was exhilarating at such a time ; even the snorting of the little red pony was delightful—it was some sound of life.

Dr. Black came into the drawing-room in a state of great excitement.

"Mrs. Floyd worse to-day ? Who can wonder ? Such weather is enough to try any constitution. Given even me a cold ;" and he coughed loudly. "Hail, you see, Miss Egerton ; and as there is never hail without thunder somewhere, it is natural the old lady should suffer from it ; at her years atmospheric influences tell. Ah ! not so bad after all ! Pulse wonderfully strong, considering ; no occasion at all to have sent for me express. Nevertheless," he added good-naturedly,

"it was natural a young thing like you should be alarmed ; it is lonely for you here, and anxious too, left with so much responsibility. Thank Heaven ! you can stand it better than most ; but keep up your strength, Miss Ellen, as well as you can ;—a little mulled port and a beefsteak would do you all the good in the world. I don't like to hint at brandy-and-water for a young lady ; but I confess it is no bad thing on a day like this." Ellen almost smiled at the transparency of the hint, but, touching the bell, ordered luncheon for Dr. Black. "As I was saying," he went on, as if unconscious of the interruption, "it really is no bad thing in such weather, as I have just tried on a poor fellow who met with a strange adventure last night. Perhaps you have heard it ?"

Ellen shook her head. Mrs. Floyd turned in her easy-chair, and said, "Heard what, doctor ?"

The question rather startled both her auditors ; but Dr. Black, drawing in his chair to the blazing hearth, began to relate that, very early that morning, he had been summoned to see a poor man, who had been most wonderfully preserved from shipwreck the preceding night. All but he had perished, the ship had gone to the bottom ; and how he had escaped was more than the man himself could tell.

"The poor fellow, as I tell you, Miss Egerton," continued Dr. Black, with animation, "was so exhausted that I could scarcely follow his story. The ship seemed bound for Ireland, as far as I could make out, but was driven out of her course by the heavy north wind, and before they were aware, they were right in face of the Great Orme's Head. No efforts could keep the vessel from running straight in shore. The crew lost their heads at last, and made no endeavours to escape ; but this fellow contrived somehow or other to creep along the bowsprit, and, being utterly reckless of danger and tired of life, according to his own account, why he was saved of course—such people always are. He was flung, or flung himself, on to a narrow ledge of rock, where he lay for a time stunned, and bleeding. It is my private opinion, Miss Egerton, that that blood-letting saved his life ; at all events he was saved. He knew the coast well, he tells me, and managed, in spite of a wounded arm, to scramble up the cliff, and crawl to the

smithy, near St. Tudno's Church. You remember it, ma'am?" turning to Mrs. Floyd; but the old lady's momentary excitement had passed, and again she sat in her usual listless attitude, her hands crossed before her, and her head turning wearily from side to side, as if unable to find a resting-place. "Well, Miss Egerton, he threw himself down by the fire, utterly exhausted, and there he was found, early next morning, by some people connected with the mines. At first they refused to believe his story, and took him for a 'knocker.' You know what a knocker is?—a cobbold, an elf, a spirit of the mines. But by-and-by they found he was flesh and blood, like themselves, and then they began to fancy his tale might be true, though so very improbable. They went to the cliffs, saw pieces of wreck floating about, and at the very spot where he described himself to have got ashore were fragments of his torn clothes. That was pretty strong proof, and so—— Eh, what? luncheon already, Brace? I had no notion it was so late. Three o'clock, on my word, and I have to see poor Llywellyn Jones before daylight fades; four good miles, Miss Egerton, before dark on a January afternoon like this; but I cannot resist that appetizing perfume. You have lunched? Well, I won't ask you to come and see me eat—only I must tell you the end. That fellow—see what pluck he had—as soon as he had rested a bit, and got some one to lend him a pony, set off straight for Conway, came to my surgery, got his arm dressed, and then he would fain have been off again,—he said he had business of importance on hand; but that was coming it a little too strong, so I interfered at once. I told him that a life so miraculously preserved was no doubt given for some good purpose, and that he was not entitled to fling it away by sheer perversity; and when I spoke in that tone—fancy, Miss Ellen, John Black taking to sermonizing!—he gave in as meek as a lamb. So I handed him over at once to the tender mercies of my old housekeeper, made her pop him into a warm bed, mixed him a good hot noggin of brandy pawnee, as we used to call it when I was in the East Indies, and, to let you into a secret, Miss Ellen, sily popped in a little condiment of my own,—a slight soporific, you know,—which, if I do not much mistake, will give him a six or eight hours' nap, and he will rise as sound as a bell.

But that reminds me Mr. Brace said luncheon was served. Good afternoon, Miss Ellen ; I wish I could give you a look in this evening, but I can't ; and really, ma'am, you have no cause to be anxious about the old lady ; I do believe now, if she had any very, very strong incitement to exertion, she would startle you by the display of a good deal of vital energy yet. You saw that little spurt when I talked of a shipwreck ; Mrs. Floyd used to like to hear a bit of news once, and does so still when she can follow it."

"Luncheon is served, Dr. Black," reiterated the grave Brace, again opening the door, "and Ruby has finished his feed, sir."

"All right, order him to the door, my good friend. I shall finish my feed too very soon. Good bye once more, Miss Egerton, and keep up your heart about the old lady."

Ellen felt half relieved, half sorry, when the busy, talking, good-natured, rosy doctor had bustled out of the room. Unpolished as he was, there was a fund of natural kindness and cheerful energy about him which had always an encouraging influence on her ; and when she had seen her grandmother was comfortable, and that her maid was in attendance, she could not resist following Dr. Black to the dining-room to see that he had all he wanted.

"All, I assure you. A capital luncheon—dinner I may call it, for it will serve me for luncheon, dinner, and supper to-day. Eight miles more on those wild mountain-sides will occupy Ruby and me for the rest of the evening, if indeed we have not to spend the night at Tywenbach ; for Llywellyn is, I fear, *in extremis*. Excuse Latin, Miss Ellen. By the way," returning from a last good bye, "that shipwrecked fellow seems to know this country well. He asked about our vicar, and Mrs. Floyd, and you. I wonder who he is. He did not volunteer his name, and of course I was not so rude as to ask questions."

Ellen only smiled in answer. Dr. Black was rather famous for catechizing strangers as to their names, occupations, and connections, and indeed was known to have accosted people by name, with no further knowledge of them beyond an address on a carpet-bag. So she rightly conjectured that the shipwrecked man, having shown some knowledge of the country, had been subjected to a pretty severe examination

as to his acquaintances in the neighbourhood; nor did it strike her as peculiar that her grandmother's name or her own should be among those with which he was familiar. Every one knew Penmorfa and Mrs. Floyd.

So she went to the window and watched Dr. Black mount his fiery steed, toil up the avenue, disappear in the plantation beyond the stables, and then she began to think how very miraculous the escape was of which she had heard. Often had she and Reginald spent a long summer's day on that wild sea-beaten cliff—often stolen with dread to the edge of the precipice beneath the old ruined church, and clinging, closely to her companion's hand, she had peered down into the depths of the green sea, far, far beneath—had watched the white flecks of foam tossed up on the narrow ledges of rock that here and there seemed to give promise of footing to a seabird, but nothing less ærial. Had the shipwrecked man climbed that? *She* would rather have perished in the sinking ship than have attempted so perilous an ascent, one which nothing but providential interposition could have effected. Then she thought of Dr. Black's words,—“I told him that a life so miraculously preserved must have been spared for a good purpose.”

The feeling was natural, and well expressed; and as she returned once more to her grandmother, she seated herself by the fire, and allowed her thoughts to wonder listlessly for what good purpose he was spared. It was an idle speculation, perhaps, and yet it interested her. She remembered to have read somewhere that Curran had spoken in much such a manner as Dr. Black, although she forgot the occasion on which the words were uttered. “But I am redeemed from this infidel despair. I am satisfied that while a man is suffered to live, it is an intimation from Providence that he has some duty to discharge, which it is mean and criminal to decline.”

The two remarks were the converse of each other. If it were mean and cowardly to desire to flee from our appointed duties, how mean and cowardly she had been—*nay*, was still. Was *her* life preserved for any good end? Would that she could think so! would that she could believe that, save to her grandmother, it was a matter of any moment to one loving human heart whether she lived or died! Why

was it that, as this thought darted through her mind, it was hastily followed by the remembrance of two who had loved her, who perhaps loved her still—cousin Frank and Reginald! How often had cousin Frank endeavoured to persuade her that happiness might be found in this world by bestowing it on another.

She knew well what he meant by this suggestion, and there was a time when she had almost been persuaded to believe it, when she felt that as violent diseases require violent remedies, there was no more effectual way of learning to forget than by taking such obligations upon her as would force her to do so. It was a dangerous idea to enter a woman's brain,—many and many a one has wrecked herself on such a one; but Ellen had no temptation to it *now*!

The evening had gradually closed in while she sat listlessly brooding on such dreamy fancies by the hearth. Mrs. Floyd was slumbering on her couch; the old cat lay stretched comfortably on the rug, winking knowingly at the flashes that shot up now and then from the wood fire. The wind howled drearily without, and the boughs of the huge beech before the house creaked like a ship's timbers under the heavy gusts. All else was very still, not a sound within the house, not a footfall, not a whisper, when suddenly a loud peal from the door-bell rang through the silence. Ellen started from her seat as if she had been shot; Mrs. Floyd woke up, and asked drowsily if Granville had come at last, and was sinking off into sleep again, when Brace entered, and advancing with his ghost-like step close to Ellen's chair, whispered,—

"A gentleman in the library, Miss Egerton, would be glad to see you for a moment."

"What is it, Brace?" said Mrs. Floyd, now completely roused.

He repeated what he had said.

"I told you so, child. I knew Granville would come to-night. Is the red room ready, child? See to it at once, or rather send Ellis here; I shall give my own orders."

The words were spoken so rapidly that Ellen had no power to check them. At the first pause, however, she explained that it was impossible it could be her father,—he was still abroad."

"Your father!" said the old lady, passing her hand across

her brow, as if thoroughly puzzled. "Ah, yes, I was dreaming. You are Ellen—Granville is your father. Ah, yes, I remember ;" and she sighed. "Still he must have the red room. Tell Ellis so, Brace, and show Mr. Egerton in here."

"It is not Mr. Egerton, ma'am," he persisted, directing an imploring look to Ellen.

"Well, what does it signify? Show him in, whoever he is," said Mrs. Floyd testily. "Am I not to be obeyed in my own house! Did not Dr. Black say I was to have my own way in everything? Do as I bid you, Brace; and, Ellen, take the keys, and——" The momentary flash was past, the head fell back, the light faded out of the eyes, and Ellen had only time to catch her in her arms, and save her from falling forward on the floor.

At that moment the door opened, and Brace introduced the stranger.

"Send Ellis here this moment," Ellen exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STRANGER.

"It was not fear or grief that shook my frame,
But an o'erpowering sense of peace and love,
Of toils gone by—perhaps of joys to come."

BLOOMFIELD.

THE stranger stood for an instant in the doorway trying to comprehend the scene before him. The long, low room was only illumined by the fitful light of the wood fire, which, sending the ghostly shadows of the furniture athwart the fretted ceiling and painted cornices, forced into strong relief the caryatides which supported the lofty mantelpiece, and fell softly and lovingly on Ellen's kneeling figure, supporting her grandmother's head on her bosom, and chafing her powerless hands in hers. The two figures by the couch were the only objects which were visible with any distinctness; the rest of the room was comparatively in darkness, especially that part of it in which the stranger stood; for it was shaded

by a large Indian screen, placed so as to protect Mrs. Floyd's favourite seat from the air of the door. He stood in perfect silence, looking earnestly at Ellen, who, entirely engrossed by her grandmother, had forgotten him, till a slight movement reminded her of his presence.

Then she looked up in some alarm as she saw the outline of a tall figure wrapped in a rough coat, such as sailors or drovers wear, and with a huge black moustache and beard almost completely concealing the lower part of his face. Seen in the half-light, there was something rather forbidding in his appearance. Yet, as she fixed her eyes keenly upon him, a strange sensation stole over her of something familiar in his air and manner which puzzled and yet reassured her. At last she ventured to ask, "Who is it?" but in a whisper so low that it was scarcely audible.

He advanced within range of the fire-light. A half-stifled scream broke from Ellen's lips as she rose from the low ottoman by her grandmother's couch and stood erect, looking at him, but without speaking or coming a step nearer him.

"Do you not know me, Ellen?" he said, advancing still closer to the sofa.

"Then it is Reginald!" she replied, rather as if thinking aloud than addressing him; "how could he come here?"

"I was shipwrecked on the Great Orme's Head last night."

"You were? You clambered up that fearful precipice? Your life was saved as if by a miracle—spared by Heaven for some good purpose?"

The tone of voice was very strange—more like that of a person who has learned a lesson by rote than as if the ideas came direct from her own mind; while the events to which she alluded had taken place so recently, and were, so far as he knew, so utterly beyond her knowledge, that a feeling of superstitious awe stole over him as he murmured in answer, "Could it be for an evil one, Ellen, that fate sent me to you?"

The well-remembered tones of his melodious voice gave full force to the loving words: the spell that had bound her was broken at once, and before she knew where she was, his arm was round her, her hand was close clasped in his, and her

tear-filled eyes were looking up into that thin sunburnt face, and drinking in the delight of seeing him again. She forgot all but that they were together once more. It was but for an instant, and then the present and past rushed back on her mind ;—she remembered her grandmother—she remembered much that she would fain have forgotten, and hastily disengaging herself from his encircling arm, she gasped, “ Oh, Reginald, what must you think of me ? But I was not myself—it was the start, the surprise. They made me forget even grandmamma—dear, dear grandmamma ;” and again she hung over her, and endeavoured by every means in her power to restore animation. What answer Reginald might have made to her exculpatory speech it is impossible to say ; for, before he could reply, Ellis and Martha appeared ; and, in the bustle that succeeded, Brace civilly suggested that the gentleman had better retire to the library till Miss Egerton was more at leisure.

Ellen bowed her head in acquiescence, and Reginald quitted the room.

The first words Mrs. Floyd uttered on regaining consciousness were—“ The red room, Ellis. He must be in the red room ; and remember, I shall never forgive him if he does not rest to-night under my roof. Yes, I am tired ; I will go to bed ; but do not forget, my child, the red room.”

It was an hour or two later when Ellen received a message of inquiry whether she would see Captain Stanhope that night or prefer that he should return early next morning ?

“ Not to-night, Martha,” Ellen said nervously ; “ I cannot see him to-night.”

“ Better not, indeed, Miss Ellen ; but you can never send him that long, bleak road to Conway in such weather. Had he not better have the red room as mistress ordered ?”

“ Is the weather so very bad ?”

Martha drew aside the window-curtain. Heavy rain-clouds were scudding across the skies, through which the pale moonbeams vainly attempted to find their way ;—the wind was blowing fiercely ; and when Ellen remembered he must either go the round-about way by the long, steep road, still half impassable with snow, or take the still more perilous path by the edge of the river-shore, she hesitated.

“ It seems, Miss Ellen, that it was Captain Stanhope who

was saved from the wreck last night. If I was you, I could not have it on my conscience to expose him to another wild hill walk. Everybody knows this is no chancy place, especially on a Friday night, and the new year, too. But have the red room for him, Miss Ellen."

"Do as you will, Martha; and tell him I shall see him to-morrow at ten o'clock. I shall breakfast in grandmamma's room, as usual."

Martha retired, thinking in her own mind how differently ladies and gentlemen acted from common folk. There was Miss Ellen and Captain Stanhope, who used to be the greatest friends in the world, meeting after such an escape, and after a "How do you do?" exchanged between them, letting a whole night pass without telling all they had to tell to one another. Had they been common people, they would have had it all out long ago.

The next morning Ellen arose, to greet, as it were, a new world. The whole aspect of physical and moral nature seemed altered for the better: the wind had gone down with the tide, the sun shone out cheerily, the snowy peaks of the far-off hills gleamed white in the distance; while a delicate haze of blue and lilac marked out the nearness or distance of the various ranges of hill and vale lying between the Conway and the Snowdon chain. The falling tide began to give glimpses of the golden sand; the dark fir-trees stood out clear and sharp against the sky; the polished leaves of the clustering ivy glistened in the morning ray; a robin sang aloud, as if luxuriating in the magical change; the heavy perfume of the moist earth mingled with the odour of the pine-trees; while over all was that delicately lilac-tinged atmosphere which is peculiar to the northern part of the Principality. Mrs. Floyd, too, was completely recovered from her last night's seizure, and showed that she had some comprehension, although a faint one, of what had taken place. Thus, in spite of the trying interview before her, Ellen's heart beat more happily than it had done for long. She had determined to receive him in her own morning-room,—their play-room in the old times; and she repaired thither a few minutes before the appointed hour, anxious to have a moment's leisure before meeting him, to think how much, or how little, rather, she might give him of Terese's

confidence ; but her plans were overturned by finding Reginald was already there.

He was standing before the chimney-piece, looking at the little ship which had so lately been replaced in its original position. His right arm leaned upon the mantelpiece, his left was supported in a sling. He looked round as she turned the handle of the door, and in an instant was by her side.

"Ellen, my own Ellen ! Thank you a thousand times for coming before the time you mentioned, and thank you, too, for receiving me here, where everything recalls that dear old past that I would not forget for all the world."

Ellen had resolved to meet him calmly ; but who could resist the speaking eyes, that, even from beneath their long, dark fringes, shone on her with such a loving glance ; who could resist that smile that gleamed even from the overhanging moustache ; above all, who could withstand the pleading tones of that melodious voice, which, even in boyhood old Jenny used to say might wile the very birds off the tree for sweetness ? *She* could not. She allowed him to sit down by her on the little old-fashioned couch just as he used to do long ago, when they were boy and girl together ; she allowed him to take her hand in his ; she allowed him to speak to her, not of Terese, but of herself, until at last she felt that another moment's yielding to such enchantment must force from her some expression of her own deep love for him—and *that* she must not betray. Poor Ellen ! she had betrayed it long ago ; the surprise of last night had shown him very plainly what her real feelings were. But she did not know it,—she fancied he might still be deceived on that point ; and, resolved to force his thoughts into another channel, she spoke of Evelyn.

She told him how eagerly they had sought her, and how willing they were to give her the protection her poor mother had desired for her. His face changed completely as she alluded to the child.

"My poor infant," he said, with emotion ; "I was on my way to her last night. She is with Mrs. Blake, near Dublin. At least, she was so when they wrote me the sad news."

"And now what——" Before she could finish the sentence the door opened, and Martha came to tell her that

Dr. Black was with Mrs. Floyd. "Would Miss Ellen like to see him?"

"Certainly, Martha; I shall be with him in an instant;" then, turning to Reginald, she added, "You know Dr. Black. You will see him, will you not?"

"With all my heart," he replied, drawing a long breath, as if the interruption were a relief. "I owe him some apology for my moonlight flitting of last night. But I could not resist——"

She was gone, and he was left alone to look round again on the objects that had once been so familiar, and to wish that he could roll back the wheels of time to the point from which he had departed thence a bright, spirited, hopeful, innocent boy, full of those glorious visions which youth always has on entering into life, but which are so seldom fulfilled. He went to the window; he looked out on the quaint terraced garden, and as his eye rested on the stately fir-tree whose slender spire rose up against the tender blue of the morning sky, the touching words of Hood flashed on his memory:—

"I remember, I remember the fir-trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,—but now 'tis little joy
To feel I'm further off from heaven than when I was a boy."

"True, true," he murmured, "I am further off from heaven; but, with that angel to guide me aright, might I not gain it even yet?"

The half-formed thoughts were dispelled by a hearty slap on the shoulder from the not very delicate hand of Dr. Black.

"Soho, my fine fellow! this is the way you steal a march on your doctor. I might have known that only Reginald Stanhope could have acted so like a fool or a madman as you did last night. Miss Egerton had no sooner told me that Captain Stanhope was here than I understood the whole story from beginning to end, and exclaimed, rather to poor Mrs. Floyd's dismay, 'By Jove, Miss Ellen, it was he, then, who was flung on the cliff the night before last!' A pretty state you put my poor old woman in, Master Reginald, by your disappearance;—nothing will convince her but that you were spirited away. I suppose she fancied—like the

barbarians with St. Paul—that though you had escaped the wreck, vengeance suffered you not to live. Eh? Was that it? But what on earth tempted you to run off before my return, or, more absurd still, what possessed you not to tell me who you were? If you wanted to surprise our friends here by your appearance,—and you surprised poor Mrs. Floyd into a fit, I hear,—you had only to say, as you used to do when a boy, ‘Come, old Black, be good-natured now, tell no one.’ Many and many a time have you said that to me when under our good rector’s roof. You have seen him, of course? No! then where have you been, and what have you been doing, and what do you intend to do?”

It was difficult to edge in a word when Dr. Black set off on one of his long discursory speeches, but at last Reginald did contrive to inform him that he was bound for Ireland to see his little girl when he was shipwrecked; that he had lost all, and that he hesitated to make himself known to his friends in the neighbourhood until he could write for and receive remittances to enable him to appear as a gentleman, and then proceed on his journey.

“Hem!” said the doctor, with a rather doubtful look, “your story is a little inconsistent, my good friend. You decline seeing your friends till you receive remittances to enable you to appear as a gentleman *and* proceed on your journey; and *therefore* you leave my roof, where you know well enough you were heartily welcome; you avoid going to see Mr. Jones, who has no more notion than a cow whether you are attired in Stultz’s best suit or dressed like a red Indian in his war paint; and you make your appearance at Penmorfa in a peacoat that even John Black would be ashamed to wear before ladies; in fact,”—looking a little closer,—“in said John Black’s discarded garments. It reminds me of the pleas in the English law-courts of payment not being necessary, because the goods were never received, *and* had been paid already. Now, would it not have been better to say, ‘Upon my word, Black, you must excuse me; but the quarters at Penmorfa are infinitely superior to yours, and the society so very much more agreeable, that, by your leave, I shall desert you for them?’”

Though Reginald was in anything but a laughing humour, it was impossible not to smile at the little man’s angry face as he

said this ; but he answered, " You are both right and wrong, my good doctor. I did wish to see my old friends at Penmorfa, but I had not the most remote intention of remaining here last night. That was quite an accident. But for Mrs. Floyd's illness I should have returned to your house, and asked you then, as I do now, to receive me for a few days under your roof. Will you do so till my future plans are more definite than they can be until I receive my remittances and letters from Dublin ? "

Dr. Black was pacified at once. " Certainly—most certainly ; make yourself at home in my little place. Come and go as you like : I do so myself, and like others to do so also. But—you won't mind my saying so—I would advise you to go soon to the rector, and report yourself to him. The people here have got up all sorts of stories about you. They say you are not canny, as the Scotch would say, and they are rather surprised that you did not sink the boat in crossing the ferry."

" When I was lying by the smithy fire," said Reginald, " I heard them speculating whether I was a knocker, or a fairy, or something out of the common. I cannot tell you how surprised I was to find that I had retained my Welsh so as to follow what they said. I understood them perfectly, and answered them glibly enough."

" That accounts for their idea of your being uncanny having taken so strong a hold of them. Who could fancy such a fellow as you to be a Welshman ? Look at yourself—what Cymry in the Principality would acknowledge you as a Taffy ? "

Reginald glanced in the mirror above the chimney-piece and smiled. " No ; I confess I am more like the red Indian you spoke of, in his war paint."

" Do you think so, Miss Egerton ? " Dr. Black asked, as Ellen entered the room. " No, I am sure you don't. You think him, as I do, a right handsome fellow. I always prophesied that little Regi would turn out a splendid specimen of humanity. Nay, don't blush so—it is like a girl, and it was no girl's exploit that of yesterday. How's the arm, by the way ? All right now ? Don't go, Miss Egerton, it's a mere scratch. Set it all to rights in the evening. Well, go with me to the rector's. Ay, that's right. Better leave the ladies for a time ; Mrs. Floyd wants rest. You may come

back to-morrow, if you like, and spend a long day, as you used to do when a boy ; but come with me now."

Ellen looked inquiringly from one to the other.

"He has promised to stay with me till he gets his letters, Miss Ellen. Between ourselves, I think he has not written for them yet, and so I am carrying him off now to give you time to 'insense' Mrs. Floyd, as the Manchester folk say, as to who he is and what brought him here. Do it quietly, Miss Ellen, and she will take it in by-and-by. And don't mind her giving him a wrong name now and then ; her mind, you see, goes back more easily than forward. I'll send Regi up to breakfast to-morrow. Good bye."

"Perhaps it is better to follow Dr. Black's advice," Reginald said, as he saw Ellen's puzzled look.

"Better ? Of course it is. Do what John Black bids you, and things will run smooth, depend upon it." And the little rough, good-hearted, keen-sighted man bundled out of the room.

"I may tell Brace to saddle your pony for the captain, Miss Ellen ?" he said, turning back. "Merlyn is in good hands, you know, with my David."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LOCK OF HAIR.

"And I bend the knee before her,
As a captive ought to bow ;
Pray thee, listen to my pleading,—
Sovereign of my soul art thou !"

ATTOUN.

THE next day Ellen persuaded herself that Mrs. Floyd began to have some notion of Reginald's identity, for she received him very kindly, although it was evident that she could not altogether comprehend the whole state of the case. Sometimes she seemed to look upon them still as children, and bade them take a walk together, or order the ponies for a long ride ; sometimes she seemed to confound Ellen with

her mother, and talked to her of things she could not comprehend, but which Ellis assured her were not worth fretting about. "Just let things take their course, Miss Ellen. Dr. Black says it is best to yield to her fancies as much as you can. And it will do you all the good in the world to go out walking or riding with Mr. Reginald. Everybody knows you were brought up together, and are almost like brother and sister in affection."

Ellen sighed and blushed, and, putting on her bonnet, hastened to join Reginald. At first they were very silent, each studiously avoiding any subject which could lead to the one point which was uppermost in their minds, and talking as people generally do in similar circumstances, of all that was most indifferent to them. They talked of the changes that had taken place in the countryside since Reginald had been there last,—of their mutual acquaintance in the neighbourhood and in Heddlesham,—of Mr. and Mrs. Egerton's long-continued stay abroad, and of Ellen's disappointment at their delay in complying with her wish that they should return at once. Mrs. Egerton was ill, they wrote, and equally unfit to travel quickly, or to be left behind; so they hoped that she would not expect them before March, and that Mrs. Floyd's state was not so precarious as she imagined.

"It is, perhaps, wrong to say so," she added, when telling Reginald the contents of this last letter, "but I sometimes think papa would fain be saved coming to Penmorfa on *any* occasion."

"Not on one like the present, surely?" Reginald answered.

"I cannot tell why I should think so, but I do. Papa never has been here since I remember; and I used, even when a child, to think it odd that he did not come. Latterly—before I came here last—he spoke as if only a very strong motive could bring him here."

"You do not doubt," said Reginald, hastily, "your father's affection for you?"

"No, not generally; but there are times when it seems to me, that if he loved me very dearly, he would not allow anything to separate us."

"We cannot always judge a man's feelings by his actions," he answered curtly.

"Still there is so strong a bond between a father and

his motherless daughter——” She stopped abruptly, remembering how he was situated with regard to his child. “*You* feel it, Reginald,” she added, in a lower tone ;—“ it was this that brought you home so soon.”

He made no answer for a few moments, but walked on with his eyes fixed on the ground. Then he said, suddenly, “ Should you mind returning to the house, Ellen ? I long to resume the conversation we began yesterday, but desire to do so in your own dear sitting-room, where we used to talk over our childish plans long ago. Will you indulge my fancy ? ”

Of course she agreed without a moment’s hesitation, and no sooner had they entered by the glass door, than he threw himself on a couch and said, “ Now, Ellen, you may talk as you will of my child, and I will try to realize that I *have* a child, if you tell me so ; hitherto, I have been unable to do so. One thought only has swallowed up others—my poor wife, how much I made her suffer ; but I never knew it, never suspected she really loved me. I should have believed you, Ellen ; you wrote to me, you assured me of her affection ; but—but—— Well, it is too late now ; tell me how to make the child happier than the mother ? ”

Ellen knew not how to answer him. She felt tempted to remind him that accident, not his fault, had betrayed his indifference to Terese ; but she feared to allude to that letter ;—she must never let him see it, it would cause him such bitter suffering.

“ Will you not answer me, Ellen ? Will you not tell me what to do ? ”

“ I told you yesterday,” she said, timidly, “ that Mrs. Beaumont and I had agreed——”

“ It is your advice, not Mrs. Beaumont’s, I wish,” he said, rather imperatively. “ Nay, Ellen,” seeing her change colour at the altered tone of his voice, “ I did not mean to speak harshly, but I have suffered much of late, and suffering makes one selfish. I wish I dared open my whole heart to you ; I wish I could tell you how that terrible news reached me, and what an effect it had upon me ; then you would understand what has changed me so much ; for I am changed, Ellen, am I not ? ”

She looked up at him through her tears. Yes, he was

very much changed—older, sterner, graver than formerly, and with a look of command on his broad brow and firm mouth that she had never observed before, but which, now that she did see it, awed her. Yet, womanlike, the awe was pleasant to her. A woman does like to feel a man her superior, and she could not look at Reginald without the consciousness that he could, if he would, exert an almost boundless influence over her. Yet how soft a glance met hers when she dared to look at him again—how that firm mouth relaxed into a smile of the fondest affection! No, no, he was not changed.

“Not to you, Ellen,” he answered, reading her thoughts before they expressed themselves in words; “but I fear I am to others. They say I was becoming tyrannical before I left India. It is possible, for I was very wretched; and I was ill as well as unhappy. The letter reached me when I was lying in my tent prostrate with fever. I looked out into the darkness, and I, who had never till then known fear, trembled;—the howling of the jackalls, the thousand wild sounds of an Indian encampment, were torture to me. I fancied I was dying, and I would have given worlds to have had one friendly ear into which to pour my sorrows, my remorse. I had none but Fred Foljambe’s, who watched over me like a brother; but to him, poor fellow, I could not tell *all*. They sent me home invalided. I was glad of it, for I was no longer fit for exertion of any kind. I cannot tell how I endured that long, tedious voyage home! One thought was constantly present to my mind,—my neglect of Terese and its fatal consequences. As I trod the deck of that wooden prison, a thousand projects passed through my brain; some of them useless enough, for it was now too late for reparation; but some I will fulfil, if Heaven permit. It seems as if fate had flung me on this coast to enable me to do so at once. Tell me again of the child. What arrangements had you made?”

She repeated what Mrs. Beaumont and she had projected.

He listened to her attentively, but made no remark upon it.

“Should you return to India,” she continued timidly, “these plans might perhaps still be carried out.”

He looked at her, but still without answering the implied

question. The fixed glance discomposed her, and she hastily asked whether he was dissatisfied with their proposed arrangements.

"Not dissatisfied with them in my then circumstances," he said, "far from it. I am very grateful to Mrs. Beaumont and to you for having made them. But does it not seem to you, Ellen, that I ought, if I can, to comply *implicitly* with poor Terese's wishes on the subject."

"Most certainly you ought; but these were the wishes she expressed in her letter to me," she answered timidly, "and I flattered myself, Reginald, that you would fulfil them by intrusting little Evelyn to my care during your absence."

Again he fixed his dark penetrating eyes upon her. "Was that *all* that was in the letter?" he asked. She blushed, but made no answer. "May I see it?"

"Oh no, no!"

"Why not? Is there anything there, do you think, that she did not confide to me?"

"I cannot tell; but—but I wish you would not ask to see it."

"I must," he replied very resolutely. "You know, Ellen, that in such circumstances I would not urge this upon you without some very cogent reason. Where poor Terese is concerned, no idle curiosity can actuate me, nothing but a sincere desire to fulfil her wishes to the best of my ability. I did not mean to make her suffer as I did; but it was done, and now——" he paused, for he felt that there was a degree of hypocrisy in trying to persuade himself that it was for Terese's sake rather than his own that he was urging Ellen to compliance, and in a changed tone added, "And now give me the letter."

The imperativeness of his voice, joined to the old habit of yielding to every wish of his, compelled her obedience. She made no further opposition; but going to a little cabinet which stood near the window, she opened it. He followed her.

"How well I remember this cabinet! We used to keep our collection of birds' eggs in that drawer, our delicate seaweeds in this. You must show me what treasures it now contains,"

She made no answer ; but her hand trembled so, that she failed to open the drawer she wished. He took the key from her, unlocked the drawer, and tried to pull it out. Some slight obstruction prevented him, and when he applied force to it, the spring yielded so suddenly that the whole contents were scattered on the floor. He stooped to gather them together.

"Do not mind them," she said eagerly, "the letter is here."

But already he had picked up the fallen treasures, and was replacing them one by one in the drawer. What could tempt any one to keep such trifles ?—a bunch of withered flowers, a broken riding-switch, some blotted lines of poetry, a few scratches of pencil-drawings, and, more strange than all, one or two scraps of scorched and torn lace. To every other eye than Reginald's these mementoes had been as nothing ; but the last revealed to him the whole life-history they contained. The lace was worn on the 15th of August, three years ago ; and the rest were intimately associated with the happy months preceding that eventful day. His heart beat fast as he looked at them and remembered each trivial incident connected with them. What she must have suffered, how much she must have loved, to preserve them so carefully, to look on each as

"Some mournful talisman, whose touch recalls
The ghost of Time in Memory's desolate halls ;
And like the vessels that of old enshrined
The soil of lands the exile left behind,
Holds all youth rescued from that native shore
Of hope and passion life shall hold no more."

There was but one thing perfect among the motley contents of the drawer,—an old-fashioned golden locket containing a large crisp curl of dark brown hair ; but as he took it in his hand to place it by the rest, Ellen snatched it from him. He did not attempt to prevent her, but said quietly,—

"I am glad you have it still, Ellen ; I shall never forget the day I gave it to you, never cease to regret that—that we parted then to meet too late."

The last words were uttered very slowly, as if he were

resolved they should be heard, and she was conscious that he marked her changing colour and the tears that welled up into her eyes as they were spoken. But she resolved not to let him see how much she felt them, and thrusting the locket into the drawer, she said, in a sharp, quick tone, very unlike her usual utterance,—

“Yes, too late, quite too late.”

“You have not given me the letter, Ellen !” was his only answer.

Mechanically she gave it him, and then seating herself in the window-seat, she leaned her arms on the cushioned window-sill, and, hiding her face, wept silently but very bitterly. His words were so different to what she had expected, that they pained her ; but she was thankful that she had retained sufficient presence of mind to give him *only* what he had asked for,—Terese’s letter ; not her confession with regard to the pocket-book. He should never know that *she* knew of that discovery.

“Ellen,” said a voice close at her ear, “you must give me the inclosure as well. It was it I wished most to see.”

“Do not ask me.”

“There are some things, Ellen, that when a man has set his heart on, he will have. This is one of them.”

Her momentary inclination to defy his authority gave way as she marked his firm-set mouth and resolute air.

“There it is,” she answered, only shifting her position sufficiently to stretch it out to him. He opened it, read it through without moving a muscle of his face, though he became visibly paler ; and then returning it to her, said, in the same measured tones,—

“I have read all this before ; she sent it to me along with her express wishes as to my future conduct with respect to Evelyn and you.”

“Me ?”

“Yes, Ellen, do you not see in that letter that she prepares you for this ? Do you not see what she wishes you to do ?”

“No,”—and she trembled violently.

“Nevertheless you desire, do you not, to comply with her wishes, whatever they are, so far as you can do so conscientiously ?”

"I must first know what they are," she answered, in great agitation.

"Do you suppose I could or would bind you to act in the dark?" he said, with a slight tinge of reproach in his tone. "Oh, Ellen, I thought you had known me better. I thought you had still some confidence in my good faith. However I shall show you that I trust you more thoroughly than you do me;" and opening his pocket-book he took from it a letter, worn and chafed by constant perusal, and put it into her hands: "Read that, and when I see you next tell me to what conclusion you have come." And without another word he rose and left the room.

For a time she sat without moving, holding in her hand the letter he had given her. A vague dread of the future stole over her. What could the wish be with which he desired her compliance? Or did he desire it? Was there not rather a kind of feeling in his mind that he owed Terese some compensation for all he had made her suffer, and that—— But why puzzle herself with vague speculations, when she had the power of ascertaining the truth at once.

As she read, her breath came thick and fast, her heart throbbed painfully, and she murmured,—“Can I, ought I to do this? Is it actually in my power to make him happy, to guide him aright, to influence him for good? Above all, does he really love me? He has never said he did—never since that fatal day.”

Never said! Ellen, Ellen, you know that he has said it, if not in words, yet in a thousand ways within the last few hours; and as for yourself, you know too well that you have no will, no heart, no mind but his.

* * * * *

And so she promised to be Reginald's wife and a mother to little Evelyn.

The next week was one of complete happiness. More than half of every day Reginald and Ellen spent together; sometimes wandering along the river-shore, which even in winter is so beautiful, with its wooded cliffs overhanging the water, its deep cavernous recesses draped with ivy and ferns, and its noble rocks standing out so grandly at every turn of the tidal river; at others retracing the hill paths

they had haunted as children; or, seated by the blazing hearth, devoting themselves with equal eagerness to Mrs. Floyd's amusement.

She had fulfilled Dr. Black's prophecy, and rallied wonderfully. Reginald's presence seemed agreeable to her; she never grew weary of asking him questions; not very pertinent perhaps, nor did she appear quite to follow the answers he gave. Still it gratified Ellen to see that she liked to talk to him; that she allowed him to perform for her some of the kindly offices which the old require from the young; and most of all it pleased her to find how readily she seemed to understand and approve of their engagement. She called him her dear boy; begged him to be very kind to her child, and, in short, did everything which the most loving grandmother could do to make his present position a pleasant one.

There was but one thing in the old lady's behaviour which was very puzzling. Ellen had accustomed herself to hear her address Reginald as Robert, and to listen to allusions to things which had no place save in her own fancy; but she could not reconcile herself to the anxiety she expressed that Mr. Egerton should delay his return till after their marriage.

Why was, this? Why did Mrs. Floyd always side with Reginald when he hinted that this would be well. He had told her that he must go to Ireland as soon as he received his remittances, and fetch Evelyn to her, and this seemed very natural; but he also evidently expected her to consent to an immediate marriage. She had said it was impossible; that in her grandmother's critical state, and in her father's absence, such a thing could not be; and he had urged her no further. But the idea had taken possession of Mrs. Floyd's brain, and she returned to it again and again.

"I am truly in earnest when I urge you to make no delay, my child," she said, one morning, more urgently than usual. "I know Granville better than you do, and am convinced that if he come before the wedding is over, some mischief will happen."

"Oh, grannie, do not speak so. My father loves me very dearly though he has never come to see me these three long

years. Still he does love me, and will never interfere with what would make my happiness. Besides, he loves Reginald also."

"Your father, child! It is Granville I am speaking of—Granville Egerton? It is *his* coming I fear. It would be far better to have the marriage over first. Don't you think so yourself," turning her lacklustric eyes on her grand-daughter, with a painful attempt to fix them earnestly on her. "You know Granville never liked Robert."

Ellen was troubled. The mixture of past and present in Mrs. Floyd's mind made it difficult to discriminate whether what she said was founded upon any real knowledge of her father's character, or was merely the wandering of a shattered mind. It was evident she rather feared than loved Mr. Egerton; still his daughter could not bear to believe that those fears were well founded. She must find out whether there was any part of her father's early life which could give grounds for Mrs. Floyd's strange antipathy. Mr. Jones might be able to tell her, or Dr. Black; but just then she remembered that it was almost time for her to go and meet Reginald at Coedbach as she had promised; and she was leaving the room to prepare for her walk, when Mrs. Floyd startled her by exclaiming,—

"The cry comes from the Dark Walk. O what a cowardly deed to fling him over! Poor, poor Robert!"

"What do you mean, dear grannie? Who threw him over?" said Ellen, with a shudder of fear at these awful words.

"Granville, child. I warned you long ago. O Robert, Robert, my darling boy!" and the old lady wrung her hands in a powerless, helpless way, that was most miserable to see.

"Ellis, what does all this mean?" Ellen said, turning to the old housekeeper, who had been about her grandmother from childhood, and was now her favourite attendant;—"I cannot make it out."

"Nothing worth minding, Miss Ellen. Mrs. Floyd often has strange fancies when she is ill. She slept badly last night, and so is a little put out this morning. We had better keep her quietly in bed till afternoon. I shall sit by her, miss, if you will take your walk as usual. Captain Stanhope

is come, and bade me tell you he would saunter down towards the shore."

Ellis's composure soothed Ellen's ruffled spirits ; still there was a weight at her heart, which she could not shake off, as she hastened to join Reginald.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DARK WALK.

"Answer'd the dark-brow'd priest, No word once spoken returneth,
Even if utter'd unwitting. Shall God excuse our rashness?
That which is done, that abides."

KINGSLEY.

COEDBACH was one of the loveliest spots on the Penmorfa estate. It was a field of only a few acres, but was so picturesquely situated, and in so sheltered a position, that it looked more like a miniature woodland glade in a foreign land than a little field on the banks of a Welsh river. Fronting the south, its gentle slopes caught every ray of sunshine ; while a sparkling streamlet that edged one side of it, and the glistening waters of the deep rolling Conway on another, gave a look of life to what otherwise had been almost too tranquil a scene. Rare and costly trees flourished there, which were not found elsewhere on the estate ; delicate ferns fringed the side of the steep bank that protected it on the north and east ; sweet wild flowers grew there in profusion ; there the warbling of birds was heard earliest in spring, and latest in summer—"It was, I ween, a lovely spot of ground," as lovely as any Thomson ever pictured, even in his "Castle of Indolence"—the loveliest that poet ever drew.

Even in winter it was beautiful ;—the grass retained its verdure, the orange-tawny of the bracken contrasted with the rich green of the polypody, and the tender shoots of the lady-fern, which never quite died away in that sheltered spot ; and now, in January, the blue-eyed violet, and its white, perfumed sister, peered here and there from their dingy

leaves ; and the clear voice of the thrush, and the chat-chat of the innumerable finches, broke the peaceful silence.

There were two ways of reaching this trysting-place : one through the fields, and along the steep bank of the gurgling stream that edged its western border ; the other, by the oft-mentioned Dark Walk, then through the orchard, and along the narrow woodland path above the shore of the Conway. Ellen hesitated which route she should take ; but remembering that it was at noon that she had promised to meet Reginald, and that it still wanted half an hour of the appointed time, and that it would be better not to show him how very eager she was to meet him, so, after a moment's consideration, decided on the longer path, by the Dark Walk.

It well deserved the name. Modern improvements have greatly altered Penmorfa, but the Dark Walk remains as it was ;—the steep path, overhung with

“ Cedar, pine, and yew,
And each dark tree that ever grew,
Is curtain'd out from heaven's wide blue ; ”

while beneath is heard the plash of the tide, which, when rising to its full height, chafes against the crumbling rock, that, wooded to the foot, overhangs the Conway's angry flood.

As she turned into this dismal path, the desire to solve the mystery connected with it increased upon her. “ I must find out who was flung down, and by whom,” she whispered. “ It is too terrible to fancy that I am the daughter of a murderer ! But that is impossible ; my father, however passionate, could never have done this.” And yet the many hints she had received piled themselves together in her mind, and made her very miserable. “ Ellis said it was a fancy—I cannot imagine such a fancy getting hold of dear grannie's mind, shattered though it is. Dare I ask Reginald what he knows ? ”

As she thought thus, she was startled by a quick step behind her ; and, turning round, she saw the little doctor, toiling after her with all his might.

“ Ah, Miss Ellen, I have caught you at last. Had a hard chase though. Never expected to find you in the Dark

Walk ! Not superstitious ? that's well ; hate superstition myself. Wish I could persuade Mrs. Floyd that ghosts are all fanev : but it's no use ; she'd sooner put her hand in the fire than enter the Dark Walk on a Friday. Odd that a sensible woman as she is should believe such nonsense, especially in broad daylight. It is eerie enough, though, crossing a wild hill-side when the darkness is coming on, and the wind howls down the gullies, and a chance blink of the moon makes the edge of a white stone, or the seathed branch of a blighted tree, look like something uncanny ; then, indeed, there is some excuse for you bethinking yourself of all the wild ghost-stories you ever heard ; but when the cold chill runs down your backbone, you just give poor Ruby a sharp stroke with your riding-switch, and off you go full speed, and forget all foolish fancies. But that was not what I came here for. Ellis tells me that Mrs. Floyd's whimsies terrified you, my dear ; you must not mind them, indeed you must not ; old people like her do take odd fancies at times—and you see how it is. She has gone back well-nigh a quarter of a century ; takes you for your dear mother, and Reginald Stanhope for poor Robbie Vere, who accidentally met his death in this very place, poor fellow. It was a sad heartbreak to your grandmother. I thought, for I was a young man then, that she would never get over it ; but the human heart is tougher than we wot, Miss Ellen—it stands a deal of wear and tear ; it breaks less easily than it bends. Mind that, my dear young lady ; and if ever sorrow comes,—as, God knows, it comes to us all,—you must not lose heart. Sorrow does not always kill ; on the contrary, the sorrow-stricken often live out their lives. Nay, I have sometimes fancied that mental suffering, like physical pain, is always sent for this good end, that we may be led to perceive that there is some organ out of repair, which we must needs look after, else the whole machine will go to pieces. Perhaps without the sharp reminder, we might fancy all was well when it was very much the contrary. But there I am off again at a tangent, when I intended nothing more than to bid you have no anxiety, dear Miss Ellen, about Mrs. Floyd. She gets on very well, very well indeed. Let her follow the same course ;—amusement, when possible ; see those she likes, decline seeing those

she dislikes ; and, above all, humour her fancies. It will do you no harm, and her all the good in the world."

Ellen blushed. "We cannot humour *all* her fancies, Dr. Black," she said ; for he had been present when on one occasion Mrs. Floyd had advised her to hasten her marriage.

The doctor smiled knowingly. "Nay, nay, Miss Ellen, that is for you to decide—I don't know. Perhaps it might be wise—who can tell? Your father—I don't mean to be impertinent, but truth, you know, will out—your father is as wedded to his peculiar fancies as Mrs. Floyd is to hers ; and I have always understood that he had formed very different plans for you. I may be mistaken, however ; it is for you to judge. Still it may be well for you to consider what you ought to do in the present tangled state of affairs. If your father forbid the banns, will you give in without a struggle? You are, perhaps, too easily guided in some things ; but there are others in which even the most yielding hold firm."

Ellen was silent, but her colour came and went rapidly.

"My dear young lady," said the doctor, pulling her gently down on a bench, which stood conveniently near, "listen to me for five minutes. You are at present placed in a very peculiar—a very awkward position. Your grandmother is in a most critical state of health ; your father is abroad, and may delay his return indefinitely. Meanwhile this young fellow comes ; thrown, as it were, at your very feet ; the only living thing saved from a fearful wreck. He wishes to marry you ; you love each other. He would be a most able protector for you, if you could make up your mind to marry him off hand, and Mr. Egerton could not *then* interfere ; but I warn you, if you do this, you run a great risk of offending him mortally ; and, take my word for it, Granville Egerton once offended is not easily pacified."

Ellen breathed quick and fast. "I cannot run such a risk," she said ; "it would be wrong to do so."

"Good girl," said the doctor with much approval, "try to hold to that resolution, and all will be well ; only—only, my dear child—remember, Miss Ellen, I have known you from your babyhood, and what is more, I knew your dear mother before you, and she put some value on poor John Black's services—and so pardon me for calling you my dear

child. Well, try to hold to this determination, Miss Ellen ; but remember you will find it no easy task ; he will do all he can to work on you. He knows his power, and—much as I love the boy—he will, like most men, use power when he has it ; and so you must nerve yourself to stand firm to the right. And now, dear, I have warned you ; so farewell.”

He sprung to his feet. Ellen called him back.

“Dr. Black, you must not go yet. You must tell me, first, why you think papa will dislike my marriage with Captain Stanhope ; and besides this, you must tell me what mystery is connected with this place, and—and”—she hesitated—“what papa had to do with Sir Robert Vere’s death ?”

“Tut, tut, child ; why ask such embarrassing questions ? It is all right now. The Veres and Egertons have long been fast friends.”

“They were not so always ?”

“No-o ; but now Sir Francis and your father are so bound together, that——” He stopped and blushed like a girl.

“Tell me everything.”

“Well, child, I have heard that your father’s dream is, that you should marry your cousin, Sir Francis. It is that which makes me think that your own private plans may clash with his.”

“My father wished this ?” Ellen said ; and there darted across her mind a thousand little confirmations of the idea.

“Yes, child, he looks upon it as a reparation, you know, to the family. But for your father’s marriage, Penmorfa had fallen to the Veres. Sir Robert was your mother’s heir, as well as——” He stopped short, Ellen urged him on.

“Tell me all about it,” she repeated.

“Perhaps it is well you should know. Secrets never come to good, so I shall begin at the beginning. The Veres and Floyds were first cousins ; they had been brought up much together, and it was the project of both houses that the young heir of the one house should marry the heiress of the other, and unite two fortunes which were moderate when divided. Your mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and her cousin Robert loved her with his whole heart. No wonder ; who could see her and *not* love her ?

But that matters little. At a Chester county ball, to which the Floyds and Veres went together, your father and mother met. Mr. Egerton was then in the prime of youth, very fascinating in manner and appearance, and of a most determined will. He fell violently in love with your mother at first sight. He got Vere to introduce him. He could not refuse ; for though they had never been intimate, he and Egerton were in the same volunteer corps, and were, besides, next neighbours in —shire. Mrs. Floyd regretted the acquaintance thus formed. She had heard much of your father which did not altogether coincide with her rather strict ideas of what a young man should be, and she endeavoured to prevent any further intimacy. It was in vain. He came to Penmorfa frequently, sometimes in Vere's company, sometimes alone ; and the daughter's welcome prevailed over the mother's coldness. And so it went on, till one fatal day he informed Mrs. Floyd that he had her daughter's permission to ask her sanction to their engagement. A terrible scene followed. Your grandmother, mortified by the failure of her well-laid plans, answered him haughtily, flatly refusing her consent to his addresses. He expostulated with her, demanded the reason for her refusal, and she gave it most openly, telling him in so many words that she considered him so passionate in temper that no mother would desire to see him the husband of her only child. But, unfortunately, she did more. We are all imprudent sometimes,—and she was very imprudent ; for she made allusion to some circumstances proving her accusation, which she could only have learned from Robert Vere. Excited by her rejection, Granville Egerton rushed from the house almost in a frenzy, and, unfortunately for both, encountered Sir Robert in this very walk. What passed between them none ever knew. The boatmen who were awaiting Mr. Egerton's return in the cove down there heard angry voices above them, followed by a struggle, and the rush of a heavy body crashing down the steep acclivity towards the shore. They took up poor Sir Robert mortally injured. The moment I saw him I felt that there was no hope. He rallied, however, for a time, tried to gasp out that his fall was purely accidental, and when your father returned from Vere Court, whither he had set off at full speed

to bring poor Mary and Francis to see their brother for the last time, he made them all shake hands with him, called him his friend, and died with his head resting on his breast. Poor Robert, no wonder Mrs. Floyd loved him, no wonder—but *that* does not matter. My story is ended. From that day Mr. Egerton made Francis Vere's interests his own; and if ever there was a friendship cemented by blood that was."

"Oh, Dr. Black, what a sad, sad story! But," and she grew very pale, "you don't think my father was to blame? It was only an accident, was it not?"

"I hope so, my child," said Dr. Black with sudden gravity; "but—I have said it before, Miss Ellen, in other words—if I had any future dealings with your father, I'd try to keep on the other side of the road when he had anything to vex him. With him it was ever a blow and a word, not a word and a blow. He regrets his violence afterwards, but it is an ill plaster to a broken limb, or a broken heart, to say, 'I did it in a passion.' Ellen Egerton, your mother was a saint on earth, but she was a martyr as well,—not to cruelty, mind you; he is not cruel, and he worshipped the very ground on which she trod; but to fear,—fear lest one day he should disgrace himself by some wild act committed when carried away by the whirlwind of his passion. They say it was in trying to save him from this that she died. I do not know. She was as fragile as she was good and beautiful. Thank God, she is now an angel in heaven!"

There was something so infinitely touching in Dr. Black's evident emotion, that Ellen in sympathy with him almost forgot how closely she herself was bound up with the actors in this sad tragedy; but she was reminded of herself by the sudden appearance of Reginald, who, anxious at her long delay, came to seek her.

The little doctor started to his feet in a moment. "Ah, Reginald, come to look after me and Miss Ellen. We have had a long *tête-à-tête* here. No treason though. I have given her lots of excellent advice; see that you do not interfere with her good resolutions. And now I must be gone, I have so much on hand. What glorious weather! who would believe this was the 14th of January?"

"The 14th of January," repeated Reginald; "and I must be in Dublin before the end of the month. I ought to be there now; for though my remittances have reached me, there is no letter from Mrs. Blake. If I do not hear immediately, I——"

"Must go at once," Ellen said sorrowfully, finishing the interrupted sentence.

"Alone, Ellen?" he answered; "*must* I go alone?"

Had the trial come so soon? She endeavoured to pretend that she had not heard the question; and, speaking very rapidly, recurred again to the hope of having Evelyn soon with her. Dr. Black had said that any amusement would be good for her grandmother, and she was so fond of young children.

"Ellen," he said abruptly, "did you hear what advice Mrs. Floyd gave me last night?"

She did not answer; she had *not* heard, but she guessed what it was.

"I think she is right. I agree with her that it would be a tempting of Providence were we to part a second time as we did once before."

"Oh, Reginald, I cannot leave her!"

"Listen to me, Ellen. When last we parted, I swore a solemn oath to myself that nothing Mrs. Markham could do would make me swerve from my faith to you. I was forsworn. Dare I run such a risk a second time?"

"There is none now," she answered very low.

"None! there are a thousand. When we parted at Heddlesham, did not we both hope to meet again as we parted? Was there any idea then that we ran any risk of being severed for ever? I cannot run such a chance again. Think of my late danger—think what it would have been if that had been the end of all. Do not put it in the power of fate again to interfere between us! I know that in Mrs. Floyd's present state you cannot leave her; still that does not prevent our marriage; on the contrary, it makes it more imperative that you should not be left alone to struggle with what must come. I entreat you then, do not send me away without the certainty that, whatever betide, you are mine—mine only—mine always."

When these wild words were uttered, Ellen resolutely

determined—as every right-minded woman would have done—to withstand every persuasion to a clandestine marriage. But, alas ! as Dr. Black had told her, Reginald's will was very strong, and hers was very weak, and he knew it. A few specious arguments, a few appeals to her affection, a few highly-coloured pictures of her desolation, should she be left alone at Penmorfa if he had returned to India, and her father was still abroad—and the victory was won.

Her promise was given, and the marriage was to take place before he sailed for Ireland.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PENMORFA CHURCH.

“ There's a cloud that fa's darker than the night,
An' darkly on that lady it came ;
There's a sleep as deep as the sleep outright—
’Tis without a feeling or a name.”

Hogg.

THE 20th of January was as lovely a morning as it was possible to conceive : the thrush sang merrily as if spring-time was indeed come ; there was a fresh, sweet perfume in the air ; the west wind gently rustled the few remaining leaves on the beech-trees ; the ivy and holly glittered in the beams of the newly risen sun ; and Ellen felt Nature's cheering influence stealing into her agitated heart, as, leaning on Reginald's arm, she walked along the lovely, tortuous lane that led towards the church. That walk she never forgot, though at the time the complication of her feelings, the fear, the hope, the half-conviction of evil, the half-reliance on Reginald's judgment—or rather on his *will*—were so at war within her that she was scarcely conscious of what passed. When it was over, she remembered every word that had been exchanged between them, every turn of the road, ever shifting shadow on the mountain, every ripple on the water, and felt that she had been happy, very happy, even in her agitation and fear.

They reached the little church. It stands there still, with the gigantic yews before the quaint old porch, the “ God's

acre," crowded with tombstones, sloping down to the little stream that gushes so merrily by the low ruined wall—an emblem of life close to the relics of death. No one had met them on that quiet road, and in the scattered hamlet through which they passed to reach the church, no one thought it remarkable that Miss Egerton and Captain Stanhope should take an early walk; while the doctor, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, were so constantly afoot among them, that neither did their presence cause any excitement.

They entered—all was prepared—the solemn words were spoken—Reginald and Ellen were man and wife.

The party broke up in the vestry. Dr. Black volunteered to look in towards evening, and drink the bride's good health, and see how the old lady was. "Kill two birds with one stone, Miss Ellen—Mrs. Stanhope I mean. 'Beg pardon, but I suppose it is Miss Ellen in the mean time. God bless you, my dear young lady, and may Reginald make you as happy as you deserve to be;" and he wrung her hand heartily.

Mr. Jones's words were more serious, but he too promised to go to Penmorfa soon. They took leave, and the bride and bridegroom retraced their steps homewards.

"All our fears are now at rest, my Ellen!" Reginald said, as they turned up the steep path towards Penmorfa. "No one can part us now. You are mine, mine for ever."

Ellen did not speak, but she clung closer to the strong arm on which she leaned, and breathed an earnest prayer that he might never regret that he had made her his wife; and the thought of having him to lean on, him to guide her, was very soothing to her peculiar temperament. She could fear nothing when with him.

They reached Penmorfa at last.

"If you please, Miss Egerton," said Brace, with his usual solemnity, as he opened the door for them, "Mrs. Floyd awoke rather tired, Ellis desired me to say, and is gone to sleep, and she begs you will not go to her room till she rings. A large packet of letters for you, sir," he added, addressing Reginald. Dr. Black's boy brought them, sir. They have just arrived."

"Ah! come at last. I am glad, and yet sorry," he said, as he and Ellen turned into the breakfast-room. "Glad to

have news of my child, but sorry to have no further excuse for lingering here, where I have been so happy."

He tore open the packet as he spoke. It contained several letters. Some which had followed him from India he instinctively put aside, conscious that they were unsuited for perusal on this his marriage day. But one, in a rather cramped handwriting, he opened at once, saying as he did so, "This is from Mrs. Blake ;—it will give us news of our dear Evelyn."

The word "our" fell pleasantly on Ellen's ear, and in obedience to his look she drew nearer him, and resting her hand lightly on his shoulder, prepared to sympathize with the pleasant intelligence he evidently expected to receive.

"My darling wife, my own Ellen !" he said, looking into her loving, gentle eyes, and passing his arm tenderly round her waist, "how thoroughly you understand, how fully you sympathize with me."

"Read, read," she said gaily ; "tell me about our child. Good heavens, Reginald! what is the matter?" she added, as the bright look faded from his face and was succeeded by an expression so terrible that it froze her very blood with fear, and made her endeavour to disengage herself from the encircling arm that strained her each instant closer and closer to his heart. "For mercy's sake let me go—you hurt me—you are crushing me to death!"

As she spoke, the frenzied embrace relaxed, and pushing her gently from him, he said, "You are right, Ellen—I dare say I did hurt you. But it is over now—all over. It was the last ; I will never offend so again."

The misery concentrated in these few words, the rigid marble look of his face as he uttered them, were far more terrible to her than the former fierceness of his expression or the physical pain he had inflicted on her ; and flinging her arms round him she said, with a faint hysterical laugh, "Reginald, Reginald ! do not mind my foolish speech. You did not hurt me. At least—at least, I would bear any pain rather than hear you speak so strangely—make such foolish jests."

The clasp of her loving arms round his neck, the pressure of the velvet cheek against his, caused the strong man to tremble through every nerve of his stalwart frame : but he gently disengaged her twining arms, and said, in a . . .

calm, measured tones, "It is no jest, Ellen, it is a stern reality. We must part to-night—we ought to part *now*."

"I will *not* part with you!" she exclaimed, with a sudden burst of passionate emotion. "Am I not your wife? Have I not the right to stay with you? Have I not loved you all my life long?—loved you unselfishly, devotedly, without even hope till now? And will you now cast me off? Reginald, Reginald, have mercy upon me! Do not forsake me!"

A wild light flashed from his eyes as he caught her once more in his arms, and strained her closely to his heart: "Ellen, you know not what you say—you know not what a temptation you put in my way. I could deceive you, but I will not. Thank God, I am not yet such a villain as to deceive one who trusts me so entirely. My darling, my best beloved, you are *not* my wife—Terese lives!"

"Lives!" gasped Ellen, fixing her eyes on him with terror. "Terese lives!—I am not your wife! Oh, Reginald, Reginald!"

* * * * *

The first great shock was over. He was to go. Each moment they expected the carriage which was to bear him away for ever. The sun which had risen so gloriously, and which they had looked upon as so favourable an augury of their future happiness, still shone in the western heavens; but their sun was set for ever,—the earth still sent up its perfume to the skies, the birds still sang; but to them the whole world was empty, and all voices a burden, save the tones they should never, never hear again.

How often of late had they sat, as they did now, in that sweet bay-window, their whispering voices sounding so sweet in the twilight!—how often had their eyes rested on the scene spread out at their feet, watching the moon stealing from a wreath of clouds, and creeping on and on along the heavens, till her faint, pale light silvered first the stem of the lordly beech, and then illuminated that picturesque fir-tree, which, standing on the extreme edge of the cliff, formed so marked a peculiarity of the landscape. But that was all past now.

There are seasons in grief, as in joy, when the tongue must be silent, for the thoughts are too deep for utterance; when all that can be done is to keep very still and wait for what we know *must* come. It was such a season now.

They sat together perfectly silent, hand clasped in hand—that tight, earnest clasp which told how strongly the heart-strings are bound together ; how terrible the wrench will be that tears them asunder ! But it was to be. It was right,—therefore it must be done ; and the very depth of their affection gave them strength to conceal from each other the intense bitterness of their suffering.

The moment of parting came at last. There were no tears, no lamentations, no earnest pleadings for one moment more of delay. They rose up at once—they whispered, “ God help us both ! ” and then their hands met for the last time in one long, fond clasp, and all was over.

He was gone.

No, not yet ; he came again. “ Ellen,” he said, “ you have a ring of mine ; give me one of yours—no matter what ; that one—yes, that ; ” and he drew from her finger the diamond they used to call her talisman. “ Once more, God bless and comfort you, and forgive us both ! ”

He was gone now—quite gone. She stood for a moment stupified ; but the sound of the carriage-wheels roused her,—she sprung from the room, rushed to the one window which overlooked the avenue, watched the moving speck as it glanced here and there in the bright sunlight. It disappeared at last completely, and with a heavy groan she fell back in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SISTERS.

"But why should break forth our repining,
Over what we have loved or have lost?
Whether fortune be shaded or shining,
Our destiny bright or declining,
Our visions accomplish'd or cross'd,—
'Tis ours to be calm and resign'd,
Faith's star beaming clear on the night of the mind."

D. M. MOIR.

"ELLEN, do you know it is nine years since you and I sat here together last?" said Kate Egerton to her sister on the first evening of the latter's return to Egerton Park; "almost a half of my life, quite a third of yours. I wonder if there is a single bit of the old Kate and Ellen left?"

Ellen smiled—not the old, bright, girlish smile; but very sweetly, very brightly still. "I can answer for it, Kate, that there is a great deal too much of the old *Adam* left, whatever there is of the old *Ellen*."

"Oh, I don't mean that sort of thing," Kate answered hurriedly, for she was the least little bit afraid of what she considered her sister's methodistical notions; "I mean in our outward selves. Now, tell me, Ellen darling, am I at all like what I used to be as a child? I remember as well as possible asking you one day if you thought me pretty, and you said quite readily 'No.' It startled me at the time, but I think it did me good to know the truth. Very few people told me the truth then; I fear very few do so now."

"Harry Dashwood always does, Kate."

"Harry! Oh, he would say anything that he thought would tease me. He has done so ever since I was so high."

"And you liked that he should?"

"I did once; I do not now. I mean," she said, correcting herself, "I mean, I like him to tell the truth, but not to tell nothing but disagreeable truths. Surely there are some pleasant things a man might say without always dipping down to the very bottom of that dreadful well where Truth

lies hid. But I don't want to speak of Harry at present, but of you and me. Ellen, I had no idea you were so beautiful."

Ellen blushed as a girl might have done at the energy with which this was spoken.

"My child," she said, very softly, "I am not beautiful; very, very far from it."

"You are perfect. Just compare yourself with me. Look at that delicate oval face; those chiselled features; the large, full, melting grey eye; the abundant beautiful hair wreathed round and round that exquisitely-shaped head; the sweet Madonna expression; the delicate complexion. No, no, Ellen, you must let me say it—you must let me compare myself with you. I see myself quite plainly—a little undersized girl with irregular features, a *nez retroussé*, great saucer eyes, coal-black hair, and complexion as swarthy as a gipsy. Who that looks on that picture and on this can fail to remember Hyperion and the Satyr? I begin to wish you had never come back to Heddlesham to snatch my few conquests from me, and make me so desperately out of conceit with myself." And as she said the words, she nestled herself closely in her sister's arms, and looked up at her with such love and admiration as made her own face actually beautiful.

There was certainly some truth in her description; Ellen had gained, not lost, in personal attractions with increase of age. The bright, unformed girl had become the calm, dignified, cultivated woman, whose unalterable sweetness of temper, and cheerful readiness to do good, made her the delight of all who knew her. Few were aware of the furnace of affliction through which she had passed, but all felt that hers was a purified spirit, which was revered as well as loved.

Little Kate, or "Kitten," as her father still frequently called her, was very different. Her continental education, and the strange jumbling of society and lessons in her short life, had rather increased than modified her childish peculiarities. She was a most amusing companion, agreeable and easy in her conversation, warm-hearted and generous in her disposition, but fond of admiration and very averse to control. She was the life of the neighbourhood, courted and caressed, but more admired than loved: She seldom condescended to show people the better side of her character, and few sus-

pected that underneath her flighty manner and quick, sharp talk there lurked a fund of latent goodness, an ardent love of what was noble and true, a contempt for her own failings, and withal a deep foundation of principle, which, poor child, she had gained more from association with the Dashwoods in early life than from her own parents.

"Well, Ellen," she repeated, as she watched the varying expression of her sister's face, "well, my darling, what is it that makes you look so keenly at me? Do you think we shall not suit one another? Do you think I really meant what I said, and would grudge my Ellen the admiration of the whole wide world, still less that of our little gossiping neighbourhood?"

"No, Kate, I do not. I believe you would give up all you most care for, if by so doing you could gratify those you love."

"Hem! There is only one person,—for you know, when one speaks the real truth, it is persons, not things, one means when talking grand about giving up the world to please those we love,—there is but one person whose attentions I should grudge you. As to the rest of my admirers, their desertion would not cost me a pang."

Ellen smiled. "I knew it was so, Kitten; I knew that that little heart of yours was as true as steel."

"You thought so. The 'faithful compass,' and so on. Well, it may or may not be; but I was talking of *conquests*, not *hearts*. They are very different things, you know."

"Are they?"

"Are they! Dear, innocent Ellen, I suppose now, if you were in my place, you would think it treason to Harry to flirt even the very tiniest bit in the world. I don't think so; and that is one point of our present disagreement. I dare say my Lady Warneford has told you all sorts of stories against me. She does not like me; she does not think me half good enough for her most excellent of brothers; but the truth is, that our only real causes of quarrel hitherto have been that I like to waltz, and he does not like me to do so with any but himself; that I like flirting,—merely, of course, *pour passer le temps*,—and he thinks I should be as grave and sober as Judith herself, who, by the way, has been married more than half a dozen years now, so could

not well be otherwise ; and, above all, that I have a fancy to waltz and flirt with 'Fascination,' as I call him ; and Master Harry chooses to be jealous,—jealous, forsooth, of a man as old as my father, and who only looks upon me as a little child ! ”

Ellen privately thought that a man who could waltz and flirt at so reverend an age was not likely to be a very desirable acquaintance for a young lively girl, especially if not a favourite of her *fiancé* ; but she had seen enough of the world and its ways to be aware that to announce her opinion was the surest way of checking all future confidence from her sister, so she merely said, “ I must see this same 'Fascination' before I pass judgment.”

“ Ay, that you must. He dines here to-morrow,—indeed, he does that three days out of every six ; so you will have plenty of time to study him.”

“ And may I know his name ? ”

“ Shall I tell you ? I am half tempted not ; but I shall be good-natured for once. It is Lord de Rochefort, our next neighbour, you know. They say he is fifty or sixty ; but he is so young-looking and handsome, so exquisitely well-dressed,—that goes a great way with me, you know,—and so very, very, very agreeable, that he is worth fifty of the young men one meets, tiresome creatures ! ”

The name of Lord de Rochefort, uttered by her sister with approval, shocked Ellen extremely. In her mind it was associated with poor Madeline Gascoigne's sad story, and with other tales to his disadvantage which she had heard about the same time ; so that it was with difficulty she forced herself to say calmly,—

“ I remember, Kate, that when I was young, people were not in the custom of cultivating Lord de Rochefort's society.”

“ No, of course not ; it was impossible. But these sort of men sometimes turn out pleasant enough in their old age ; and I defy even you, my dear, prudish sister, to dislike 'Fascination' now. But I suppose I ought to bid you good night, you look awfully tired. Shall I send staid Mrs. Martha to you, or my own little Seraphine ; Seraphine would be *charmée* to be allowed to do anything for you. She never forgets how you sat up with her that night at

Chamberry, when she was so ill. But for your care she firmly believes she would have died. Oh, Ellen! how many there are who would lay down their lives for you, while for poor little me—— Well, well, it will all come right some day I suppose."

"I am sure it will, dear Kate." The soft pressure of her sister's lips on her burning cheek touched Kate's excitable heart, and flinging her arms round her, she exclaimed, "Ellen, dear Ellen, I feel, I know, that you will prove my guardian angel. Already you have made me happier than I was,—God bless you for it!" and with another fond embrace she rushed out of the room.

"Poor, dear Kate," said Ellen to herself as she closed the door behind her, "the light cloud will soon pass away from your sky. A few words of explanation between you will set all to rights." And then she sighed and thanked God that in the blank of her own blighted life so many fresh interests had been permitted to rise up round her, so many new ties had been granted to make her existence bearable. She had learned much within the last five years; sorrow and suffering had forced upon her a lesson which a whole life of prosperity might have failed to teach,—that without religion there is no peace here or hereafter.

Human pride may nerve us to go through some trials; the fear of the world's dread laugh may save us from some temptations; the pleasures of life may for a time at least enable us to forget even that "sorrow's crown of sorrows, the remembering of happier things;" but vital religion alone—a sense of our own great unworthiness and an entire reliance on His help whose yoke is easy and burden light—can enable us to possess our souls in peace, to comprehend that every cloud of wrath has a silver lining of mercy, and that all suffering which we endure here below is ordered for some good end, which we shall one day comprehend, though now we only see it through a glass darkly. Till her great sorrow came, Ellen thought little of these things. But it has been well said that

"The shower that bows the lily's head
Oft leaves a precious moisture at its roots."

And the storm which had wrecked her earthly happiness

had also laid bare to her sight "the pearl of great price," while the deprivation of the idol she had worshipped had by God's providence thrown her among true friends, who assisted the fainting, thirsty pilgrim to reach the one and only fountain of our great salvation. She had tasted of its living waters and was healed.

The heavy swoon which had followed Reginald's departure was succeeded by brain fever of so alarming a nature that Dr. Black at once summoned Mrs. Beaumont to Penmorfa, and by her advice sent an express to recall Mr. Egerton to England. Ellen had rallied slightly before her father's arrival, but was still too weak to utter a syllable, or give any explanation of what had happened. Neither Mrs. Beaumont nor Dr. Black was inclined to volunteer it; so that Mr. Egerton never imagined that there was any other cause for her illness than over-exertion in attending her grandmother's death-bed, and while he blamed himself for neglecting her repeated entreaties to return, he took it for granted that, now all was over,—for poor Mrs. Floyd's earthly career was ended,—she would soon rally.

So the morning after the funeral he returned to the continent, satisfied, as he told Mrs. Beaumont, that his dear child could not be in better hands than hers and good, kind Dr. Black's, to whom they *both* owed so much. And the emphasis he laid on that word showed to what point his thoughts had gone back.

When Ellen was well enough to be moved, they carried her to Beaumont Lodge, and there she spent many months,—months that were to her future life of most important advantage. Mr. Egerton frequently visited her there; he could bear to visit Mary Beaumont, though he still shrunk from the painful associations connected with Penmorfa, and was delighted to find how often Sir Francis Vere was there at the same time as Ellen. To his influence he attributed much of the improvement in her health and spirits; nor was he wrong in so believing: only he fancied that his own favourite scheme was on the eve of fulfilment, when, in fact, it was relinquished for ever by Sir Francis. He was content now to be her friend—her sincere friend—aiding her in her search after true happiness, and thanking Heaven that he had been permitted to be the instrument of leading her to

its only true sonree. But nobody cared to undeceive Mr Egerton. Perhaps they were not aware he was deceived.

As soon as she could be moved, Ellen was ordered to a warmer climate, and the Egerton family spent a few months together in Italy very harmoniously. But by the time Kate was fifteen, Mrs. Egerton suddenly discovered that a foreign life did not now suit the state of her health, and insisted on returning to Egerton Park. Her husband, too, was beginning to get tired of his antiquarian researches, and to find that Etrurian vases and ruined statues did not make up for the loss of home comforts, a quiet library, and agricultural pursuits; so he yielded to his wife's persuasions, and left Ellen to the care of the Warnefords, who had left India on succeeding to the title and estates of the family, and had determined to winter at Florence. With them, and other friends, Ellen remained abroad for several years; and thus it happened that when she returned home, the sisters were almost strangers.

What a strange sensation it gave Ellen to be again in Heddlesham! As they drove through the town, she seemed to recognize the same lame beggar who used to stand at the gate of the cavalry barracks ten years before; the same lean dogs barking after the carriage; the same dirty children wrestling in the gutter; and as they reached the gate nearest the officers' quarters, two gentlemen came out of it, and, as they passed the carriage, bowed to Mr. Egerton—one of them mounted on a bay horse, with black points, so like that which Colonel Wyndham used to ride, that for a moment Ellen bent forward, almost expecting he would salute her also. They reached Madame Nicolini's, the milliner's, Mrs. Egerton's favourite lounge, as gay in caps and ribbons as of old; and before the confectioner's, next door, stood a handsome britska and pair of horses, which a gentleman was driving. He recognized them in a moment, called to Mr. Egerton's coachman to stop, flung the reins to his servant, and scrambling down, rushed to the door of the carriage, and thrust out his hand, exclaiming, "Miss Egerton, by Jove! it makes me young again to see your face." It was Sir Edmund Manners, but so changed for the worse, that Ellen felt it would take a very great deal to make him young again.

And when they reached the Park—when she found her-

self clasped in Kate's arms—when she saw the young girl transformed into the woman—when she marked how wrinkled, and old, and worn her stepmother had become—how few sable hairs now darkened her father's white head, and how the once erect figure was bowed, the once clear eye dimmed, she fully realized that—as Kate afterwards observed—a full third of her life had passed since last she had trodden these rooms.

But if they were changed, so was she—so much so, that she could hardly believe in her own identity ; yet there were some feelings lingering about her still which told her she was the same Ellen who had come there ten years before, young, ignorant, hopeful, and happy. Little Kate had carefully gathered together everything which she could herself recall as having belonged to Ellen ; and the sight of these old relics brought the past so clearly before her, that she felt it *was* she who had gone through it all ; and the ghosts of the past flitted before her imagination as clearly as if she saw them with the eyes of sight.

Reginald and Terese were, naturally, the principal figures. She had heard little of either for many a long day. A letter to Dr. Black, soon after Reginald's departure, had informed them that he had met his wife and child in Dublin, and had also explained the origin of his—of their fatal delusion. A trance of immense length had so counterfeited death that all were deceived, and the anxiety Terese had expressed that her letters should be despatched without an instant's delay after her death, had induced Mrs. Blake to post them at once. On her mistress's recovery, the good woman had again written to India, in the hope of overtaking the first mail ; but it was too late, for Reginald had already sailed for England. When he reached Dublin, he found Terese alive but a confirmed invalid, requiring most unremitting attention ; he therefore resolved to leave the army, and devote himself to her. "It was," he wrote to Dr. Black, "the only reparation he could make for his involuntary error." And then he spoke of Ellen ; but the little doctor did not dare to show her what he wrote, though she knew, from the way in which he alluded to it, that Reginald felt for her, as she did for him.

A few months later, Dr. Black heard again—Reginald

had sold out. His wife was in the same hopeless state—his child was his only solace. "God be thanked," he wrote, "that He has left me this sweet flower, to be my consolation and tie to life."

To Ellen he wrote but once, and that only a few lines in answer to a letter she had sent him before leaving Penmorfa, telling him where she had sought for consolation in her affliction. But few as they were, his words were most valuable to her, for they assured her that he too had been led to seek comfort where only it is to be found; and that while fully conscious of his faults, seeing, more clearly even than she could do, that in them his present misery had taken root, he could now look upwards with earnest faith and hope, could believe that the life so miraculously preserved might even yet be devoted to the good of his fellow-creatures.

He begged her not to write to him again, but to send him a message through Sir Francis Vere, "the kindest of his friends."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LORD DE ROCHEFORT.

"Oh! mickle thinks my luve o' my beauty,
And mickle thinks my luve o' my kin;
But little thinks my luve I ken brawly
My tocher's the jewel has charms for him."
BURNS.

"WELL, Ellen," Mrs. Egerton remarked, as they lingered over a late luncheon, "you are come just in time for all the autumn gaieties. We have an archery meeting here next month; the Hautons are going to give a fancy ball; the Mannerses have a dinner next week, to which, by the way, you are invited; and there are to be two or three good concerts in Heddlesham in September."

"Ellen does not look as much impressed, Charlotte, as she ought to be by such a list," said Mr. Egerton, with a half-smile; "perhaps, like her old father, she finds all this gadding about infinitely tiresome."

"Nonsense, Mr. Egerton; you must not put such fancies in her head. I like gaiety, so does Kate, and so does Ellen too, I am certain. She is far too pretty to wish to mope at home."

Ellen laughed. "I assure you I enjoy society very much," she replied; "only I am not so strong as I used to be, therefore eschew balls and fatigue of all sorts."

"Nonsense," again repeated her stepmother; "you must go to balls, Ellen; I insist upon it. I am determined you shall show people you are not grown a Methodist or Quaker, or any of those dreadful things. Besides, I want some amusement at home,—I prefer it infinitely to going out; and I have set my heart on eclipsing the Mannerses. Has Kate told you all they have been doing? I do so detest Lady Manners; poor Sir Edmund is quite a nonentity in his own house; but Lady Manners is the most impertinent woman I know. Only imagine, she has brought a niece to live with her, and introduce here, simply to spite Kate. She fancies that a girl of seventeen will be more attractive than one two years older. But her machinations will never succeed. None of Kate's partners will ever desert her for Adelaide Delancy."

"Adelaide is very pretty, mamma," Kate said.

"Showy-looking, I allow; but nothing to be compared with my Kitten."

"Ellen agrees with me, mamma, that I am a little fright; *piquante* perhaps, but plain."

Mrs. Egerton turned a pair of very angry blue eyes on her step-daughter; but Ellen's answer averted the impending storm.

"Whether Kitten is pretty or not I cannot tell; I only know I would not exchange my fairy, dainty Kate for any Kate in Christendom."

Kate turned away her face for a moment as she observed, rather seriously, "I wish other people thought as you do, Ellen." Then she added rapidly, "Who dine here to-day, mamma?"

"To-day!" repeated Mr. Egerton, looking up from his newspaper; "surely, Charlotte, you have not invited any one to break in on our domestic circle the first day Ellen is at home."

"Pray don't be cross, Granville," was his wife's only answer; while Kate explained that there was to be no party, only one or two gentlemen,—and Ellen did not look tired.

"I tell you what it is, Kate," said her father, sharply; "this mania of yours and your mother's for society will end in your having very little of mine, if you care for that." And taking up the *Times*, he quitted the room, banging the door after him.

Ellen looked shocked and astonished; Kate laughed, and said it would all smooth down by-and-by, if they let poor, dear, irritable papa alone; while Mrs. Egerton began a long complaint of her husband's unsociability,—of her being a martyr to her affection for him, giving up amusement, everything, to please him,—and this was all she gained by it! She really wished that Ellen would take her father in hand, for no one else could manage him. "Long ago, there were no objections made to friends dropping in daily to dinner; that acquaintance of yours, Ellen, Stanfield, or Stanhope, or whatever he was called, was at the Park morning, noon, and night, and nobody made any difficulty; and as to Sir Francis Vere, he was more than welcome."

"So he is still," Kate said boldly; while Ellen changed colour at finding herself so suddenly attacked by her step-mother.

"He may be still welcome, but he is far less here than he used to be in Ellen's time," answered Mrs. Egerton, fretfully. "When she was at home, he never could be here often enough; and now we see him about a dozen times in a twelvemonth. In those days, however, the house was crammed from garret to cellar, and Mr. Egerton——"

"No use raking up old stories, mamma dear," said Kate, coolly interrupting her jeremiads. "Papa is not so young as he was, and so bustle annoys him. Luckily, however, he is quite civil to our friends when they do come, and that is all we can expect? But, Ellen, as the day is too hot for a drive, what say you to turning over the treasures you have brought from Paris? Seraphine tells me she caught a glimpse of a *robe de crêpe rose à cinq volants gaufrés*,—and a *coiffure d'azalées*, which have set her French imagination on fire. Perhaps you will let me take some hints for my new ball-dress?"

‘The *robe de crêpe rose* was intended for my little Kate,” said Ellen affectionately; “I know that her French education has made love of dress second nature to her.”

“I believe it has,” Kate said, with a half-sigh; “at least, Harry used to accuse me of thinking too much of dress, silly fellow; as if it were not a woman’s duty to make the best she can of herself.” The sombre expression of her face as she alluded to Harry always touched Ellen; but before she could take up the subject, the flighty girl was immersed in flowers and ribbons, expressing, in a childish manner, her ecstasies of delight when she learned how many of these pretty things were for her, and robing and disrobing herself to see the effect of each dear delicious dress, while at the same time she chattered away on all sorts of subjects,—

“From grave to gay, from lively to severe.”

“Don’t think me quite a fool, Ellen dear,” she said, at length; “for though I love a new dress as I do everything else that is pretty, I can both read and think, and—‘tell it not in Gath’—rather sadly too, sometimes. But it is no use to let the world behind the curtain of one’s mind. Those cameos for me also? Ah! Ellen, you do spoil your little sister. What beauties they are! And how like you that Madonna is! How pleased mamma will be! And the *coiffure d’azalées*, is it also for me,—and those exquisite feather-flowers! I shall love nuns from this time forth.” And then, as if the word had suggested a very different idea, she began to hum a favourite song of the day:—

“‘I won’t be a nun, I can’t be a nun.’”

Who would be a nun or an old maid if they could help it? Yet you, Ellen, are eight-and-twenty, and still unmarried; I can’t make it out. What fools men must be to have let you reach such an awful age and be still Miss Egerton!

Ellen did not answer,—every such allusion still caused her acute pain; but she had so learned to control her feelings, that nothing, save a slight change of colour, betrayed that she felt annoyed by her sister’s speech; and Kate was too much self-occupied to remark even that evidence of emotion. “Six o’clock already!” she exclaimed; “how shall I be ready in time? and I wagered half a dozen

pairs of gloves with a particular friend of mine that I should be in the drawing-room before him. I know, therefore, he will be exact to a moment. Seraphine, Seraphine, make haste!" and then she darted out of the room.

Ellen looked after her with a half-sigh, half-smile. Much as Judith had told her of Kate's eccentricities, she had imagined nothing so provoking and yet so delightful as her little follies,—nothing so fascinating as her sparkling talk and merry laugh, combined with such sterling good sense, so much solid information, and so much good-heartedness. "Ah! Harry, Harry," she said, "you will never forgive yourself if you allow any foolish quarrel to separate you from so dear a little creature!"

When Ellen entered the drawing-room it was still empty; and as she found herself once more in these well-remembered rooms, she unconsciously left the larger apartment for the little one which had formerly been her boudoir. The sun was setting, and flooded the plain with golden light; and as she seated herself on the low divan, and looked out on the once familiar scene, she endeavoured to realize the truth of being once more at Egerton Park. How like a dream now seemed the past with which it was associated!—the short whirling season of amusement,—the melancholy blank that followed,—the delicious happiness of the few days at Penmorfa when Reginald was there,—the crushing weight which had fallen on her when he left! Was it she, indeed, who had passed through such a life?—she, the quiet, unexcitable creature, whom all thought so placid in temper that nothing had ever ruffled her existence, save those trials connected with delicacy of health! It almost required the evidence of the fatal marriage-ring still on her finger to convince her that that Ellen Egerton and this were one and the same. And yet, as she sat there,—

"So soon ready, Miss Egerton," a musical voice from the other room exclaimed, breaking in on her reverie; "I had flattered myself I should have won the wager."

Ellen rose at this address, and advancing from under the shadow of the window-drapery, said, "My sister will be here immediately."

The stranger stepped back with a graceful apology for his mistake, then murmured some scarce audible words of the

half-light, the family air, the turn of the head having misled him, and added some prettily-expressed allusion to having heard Miss Kate Egerton speak of her elder sister being expected. Was it possible that he addressed Miss Egerton?

Ellen was half amused by the compliment implied in the emphasis on the *elder* sister, but answered with perfect self-possession that she was the person in question; and the new-comer, as if he felt that the interchange of a couple of sentences formed a sufficient introduction, approached the window and began to talk as if they had been old acquaintances. There was nothing very original in what he said; but his remarks showed a knowledge of places, people, and things, which only a clever man of the world could have acquired, and only one accustomed to society could have given forth so easily and agreeably.

A slightly malicious smile beamed from Kate's lip and eye when, a few minutes later, she too entered the boudoir.

"My introduction of my sister is no longer necessary, it would seem," she said.

"Not in the least," he replied, with a rather harshly-ringing laugh; "both there and in your wager I have out-generalled you, Miss Egerton."

"I forgot my wager; but, remember, I am now superseded,—my sister is Miss Egerton; I am only Kate."

"Only Kate! to my ear the change is charming. Kate Percy, Queen Katherine, and a thousand other delicious Kates rise up to one's recollection with the expressive name," he replied; and there was a certain gallant familiarity in his tone that impressed Ellen so unfavourably, that for a moment she almost suspected him to be Lord de Rochefort. Yet that seemed impossible. The stranger's dark locks, piercing eyes, elastic step, and full rich voice, were those of a man under thirty; and though, perhaps, a few treacherous lines round the mouth and eyes might induce one to add a year or two to his apparent age, she could not believe him to have reached forty, and she knew that Lord de Rochefort was older than her father.

The other guests entered, dinner was announced, and Mr. Egerton's introduction of "Lord de Rochefort—my eldest daughter" showed her the first guess was correct, and

the youthful-looking man really was he whom she had long considered as old, alike in years and iniquity. By some manœuvre of Kate's, he was seated near Ellen at table ; and before she left the dining-room she was forced, in spite of her prejudice against him, to confess that he well deserved the title of "Fascination," and that it was not unnatural that Harry Dashwood should consider him as a formidable rival in Kate's good graces.

The evening was devoted to music. Ellen had expected from Lord de Rochefort's way of speaking, that he knew something of it as a science ; but was scarcely prepared for the proficiency he displayed in it as an art ; nor could she reconcile herself to seeing how completely he identified himself with Kate in the performance of various pieces.

Innumerable allusions to "our duet," "my favourite song," "the little air I gave you," grated upon her, although she felt herself almost too particular in feeling so much annoyed by such trifles.

If he had not been Lord de Rochefort, it had been natural and pleasant to see her young sister so desirous to gain the approval of an elderly connoisseur ; but it was evident that it was in no such light that Lord de Rochefort looked upon Kate.

In what light he did look upon her, it was difficult to say ; but certainly he did not address her as one could have wished a man of his years to converse with a young and attractive girl.

Kate forced Ellen to sing. Her long residence abroad had enabled her to cultivate her great musical talent to the utmost ; and no one could listen to that pure, thrilling voice without real admiration, and Lord de Rochefort's enchantment was easily seen ; but he did not express his delight in words—he only listened and sighed ; and, as he rose to take leave, said in a low, telling whisper,—

"You *are* superseded, Miss Kate ; that singing makes me feel I have still a heart."

Kate blushed a little ; but laughingly said she knew it would be so ; and then he took leave.

"Well, Ellen, is he or is he not fascinating ?"

"Very."

"I told you you would soon get over your prejudice

against him. My own private opinion is that there is a great deal of good in him ; but, having been extravagant in his youth, he is a poor peer now, and so every body pulls him down."

Ellen was silent. To her more experienced eye the cloven foot had once or twice been visible ; but she held to her resolution to delay expressing her opinion till she knew him better, and had gained a stronger hold on her sister's affection.

The latter was soon effected. Kate's love for her increased day by day, and her confidence in her also ; there were but two subjects on which she was reserved, her half broken-off engagement with Harry Dashwood, and the extent of her interest in Lord de Rochefort. For some time after Ellen's arrival they were in the habit of meeting him frequently in society, and Kate never failed to point out to her sister how very much more agreeable those parties were to which he was invited. His conversation was so easy, his manner so courteous, and his music so delicious : it was dull, dull, when "Fascination" was not present at the hum-drum dinners of the neighbourhood.

Ellen acknowledged that this was true, but persisted in disliking Lord de Rochefort. "She never felt at ease in his company," she said.

Kate laughed at her. "I suppose, Ellen, that is because you don't like to be admired ; for that is the only reason I can perceive why you should disapprove of my paragon."

Ellen could scarcely help smiling at Kate's remark, though in truth she had better grounds than her sister suspected for being annoyed at her jesting remark. When first introduced to Lord de Rochefort, Ellen had found her original repugnance to him increased by his patronizing, almost *appropriating*, manner towards Kate ; latterly even this offence was aggravated by the inclination he showed, while continuing his devotion to her sister, to assume something of the same kind towards herself ; and she had also perceived that this change had taken place soon after he had learned, from some foolish speech of her stepmother's, that her grandmother's large fortune had been left at her entire disposal, and that she was the heiress of Egerton Park,—not a co-heiress with Kate, as had been supposed. Ellen had been ashamed of

herself when first the idea crossed her mind ; but when once admitted, it was forced upon her in a thousand different ways, till at length he seized the opportunity of finding her alone, one day when he called, to put her feelings towards him to the test. The interview was a painful one. He tried every means to force her into an acceptance of his proposals, or at least to induce her to receive him for a time as her suitor, "to allow him," as he expressed it, "to endeavour to make some impression on her stony heart."

But all efforts were unavailing. She quietly, but determinedly, refused to give him the slightest hope, the faintest shadow of encouragement, and from that day they saw scarcely anything of Lord de Rochefort. Kate wondered why it was so, and why he never came to see them now, and Mrs. Egerton grieved openly over his defection.

"He was now constantly at Manners Manor. She should not be surprised if, after all, Adelaide Delancy carried off the prize;" and then she fretted over the injustice of fortune in allowing her daughter to be engaged to a briefless barrister while other girls had such honours thrust on them.

Kate lost patience with her at last. "I assure you, mamma, I should not like to be Lady de Rochefort, if that is what you mean. If Adelaide does, why she has my full consent. It will not cost me a pang (a favourite expression of Kate's) to greet her as my lady, and give her precedence. Only I don't think either of them will be such fools. Adelaide has only five thousand pounds, and he has worse than nothing—over head and ears in debt, they say."

"Is it not a pity, Kate," her mother observed, after ten minutes' cogitation—"is it not a pity that he did not think of admiring Ellen? At one time I quite fancied he did; and her fortune, you know, would put him all straight. She could sell Penforma, and settle at the Grange, and it would be so nice."

Kate laughed. "It won't do, mamma. Ellen is a determined old maid. She would not have a prince of the blood if he asked her."

"I doubt that, Kate," said Mrs. Egerton, very resolutely.

"I do not, mamma. I am quite sure, from what Mrs. Dashwood told me, that Ellen might have married a dozen

times if she had liked when abroad, and she most certainly would not be caught by the mere glitter of a coronet."

"Hem! Girls of eight-and-twenty will catch at anything," said Mrs. Egerton, spitefully. "Look at Lady Beatrice Hauton! See what she does to attract Major Stewart, and he is nothing. See how Mildred Trevillian seized—actually seized—on poor Sir Edmund Manners; and don't suppose that Ellen will not follow their example. Girls of eight-and-twenty are old enough to marry anything."

Again Kate laughed; but when, after a considerable lapse of time, they next met Lord de Rochefort, she was struck by the change in his manner both to herself and Ellen. There was a deference, a look of anxiety to please, and yet an apparent doubt of his own success, which she had never observed before, and which she felt implied some peculiarity of feeling: perhaps, after all, Mrs. Egerton was right, it was Ellen, not Adelaide, who was the real object of his devotion. If it were so, however, Ellen was most pointed in her avoidance of him when it could be done without actual rudeness.

It surprised the Egerton Park family that Lord de Rochefort was not at the Hauton's fancy ball. He had promised Kate to appear in his splendid Albanian costume, but when the evening arrived he was not there. Lady Beatrice said, a little stiffly, that she understood he had a summons to town on business, and the explanation seemed so natural that it never occurred to any one to imagine there was any mystery about the matter, till an event took place which overturned all Mrs. Egerton's castles in the air with regard to Lord de Rochefort.

Ellen and Kate had been for some time engaged to spend the last of August at Manners Manor. Lady Manners had of late been particularly cordial to them both—to Kate especially—and had been so pressing in her wish to have them with her for "a long day" (that most wearisome of invitations where people are not on the most intimate terms), that it was impossible to refuse her.

It was rather a sad visit to Ellen. It is true she had never cared much for Sir Edmund, but it is melancholy to see any man a cipher in his own house, and that he was so in his was only too painfully evident. He was most anxious to show the sisters every attention in his power, and after

luncheon proposed one plan of amusement after another. But it was only necessary for him to suggest a thing to have his wife disapprove of it. Matrimony had laid a heavy hand on him. The faint flashes of vivacity, the meagre attempts at wit were quenched now ; no one listened to his long-winded stories, no one laughed at his wretched *bon-mots* : he was a hen-pecked man, and in a fashion so glaring that even he could not help seeing that others were aware of it ; but he had not energy to make a stand against his imperious spouse—he lived but to obey.

He talked of old days with regret. He hinted that he had never been happy since his mother's death—he did not venture to say since his marriage, but it was plain that that was what he meant. He spoke of his sister. She had left Heddlesham, and gone to reside in the south with "an aunt of most ant-like industry ;" and as he uttered this faint shadow of the puns of former times a melancholy smile illuminated his inexpressive face, but died out suddenly, showing that his little heart was not so light as it had been.

The long day was long indeed. Lady Manners was extremely polite to them ; Adelaide made a thousand pretty speeches ; but they felt notwithstanding as if their visit were ill-timed. Lady Manners seemed overwhelmed by little engagements. Twice she was interrupted to answer notes which required immediate attention, and sundry meaning glances exchanged between the aunt and niece led the sisters to believe that something unusual was going on, while Adelaide was so pre-occupied that it was only by fits and starts that she seemed to remember her duty of entertaining her guests.

The dressing-bell was a relief to all.

Kate, the moment they were alone, congratulated Ellen on two-thirds of their penance being over. Ellen smiled, and said that they had got through it wonderfully ; but confessed, to Kate's great delight, that a week at Manners Manor would wear her out.

"Mamma cannot understand why I pity Adelaide Delauncy," Kate said. "Cannot you, Ellen ?"

"Yes, indeed ; that constant fret-fret of Lady Manners must be torture to a sensitive girl."

"I don't think Adelaide is sensitive ; but I sometimes

think she will rebel at last. Once or twice I have seen a gleam in her eye which seems to hint that there is mischief brewing, and that she will not always be so easily guided as she is now. If once *le cœur parle* she will take the bit between her teeth, and Lady Manners may fling away the reins at once, for they will be useless. She must content herself with her husband's obedience then."

"What is that?" asked Ellen hastily, as the sound of clanging doors was heard, and loud voices speaking angrily.

"Lady Manners giving her gentle orders," said Kate calmly. "I am glad we are to have some relief from the family party at dinner."

The first person who greeted them on entering the drawing-room was Sir Francis Vere, who had been absent from home ever since Ellen's return, and who, charmed to see her again, soon engaged her in earnest conversation.

The rest of the party were dispersed about the large room in separate groups, and Kate, finding herself a little thrown out, took a seat in a distant window, and amused herself with making observations on the others.

Surely there was something strange about them all? Lady Manners looked very pale and stern, as, seated on a sofa with Lady Beatrice Hauton, they talked together in animated whispers. Mrs. Elphinstone and Major Stewart formed another deeply engrossed couple, while Sir Edmund, Colonel Elphinstone, and Frederick Hauton, leaned on the mantelpiece, with their backs to the empty grate, and seemed to have some subject of moment under discussion; for Colonel Elphinstone pulled his long moustaches with great vigour, Mr. Hauton talked very fast and mysteriously, and poor Sir Edmund got more fidgety and restless every instant.

What could it all mean? and what had become of Lord de Rochefort? Certainly Lady Manners had mentioned that they expected him, and had given Adelaide such a look as she said so, that Kate had supposed his coming was a matter of some importance.

Adelaide was seated somewhat apart from her aunt's sofa talking to one of the young Trevillians; but Kate fancied that even her calm face bore tokens of recent discomposure. She was very pale, and a tinge of red round her eyelids told of tears very lately shed, but she was unusually quiet, save for

one or two rapid glances towards the door, which seemed to show that her attention was not entirely engrossed by her companion.

"Sir Edmund," exclaimed Lady Manners at last, "ring for dinner."

Sir Edmund crossed the room, and whispered a few words to his wife. She shook her head.

"I cannot help it. I shall not wait another moment. I do not believe he will come."

"I hope not, I'm sure."

"Well, then, ring the bell;" and the obedient husband did as he was desired.

Who would not come, Kate wondered—Lord de Rochefort?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD SUBJECT.

"Then speak again, not all thy former tale,
But this one word, whether thy tale be true."

KING JOHN.

DINNER was almost over when a peal at the door-bell announced the absent guest. Sir Edmund looked very uncomfortable, fidgeted on his chair, and asked whether the first course had not better be replaced.

Lady Manners said simply "No," and resumed the sentence she had been addressing to Colonel Elphinstone. The door opened, and Lord de Rochefort entered.

A sudden silence followed. Sir Edmund rose up hastily, with a very red face, and called to the servants to bring soup or fish for Lord de Rochefort, to place a chair for him, &c. &c., at the same time saying they had begun to despair of his arrival.

"Pray take no trouble on my account, Sir Edmund. Here is a place reserved!" said Lord de Rochefort with a laugh, as he took a chair the footman placed for him between Kate and Adelaide Delancy. Lady Manners looked annoyed, and desired that Lord de Rochefort's seat might be placed near

Sir Edmund, but Lord de Rochefort assured her he was perfectly comfortable where he was, and proceeded to discuss the soup placed before him with apparent gusto, talking the while to the young ladies with perfect self-possession.

Kate, unable to comprehend what was going on, and a little disgusted at Lady Manners's rudeness, chatted with him readily, but Adelaide was very silent, and only answered those questions which were particularly addressed to herself. Conversation among the other guests flagged entirely. Nobody seemed to find a word to say about anything, and the ladies retired unusually early. The evening was sultry, and the drawing-room so very hot, that when Ellen and Kate found themselves by the window opening on to the soft velvet lawn, they ventured to propose a stroll in the garden, reminding Miss Delancy that it had been voted to be too hot to go thither in the afternoon.

Adelaide hesitated, said it would be very charming, but the dew was heavy, she had a cold, and—and—— She glanced at her delicate white dress and satin slippers, and decided she could not go, but she was sure nothing would please her aunt better than that the Miss Egertons should do what was most agreeable to themselves. Kate accepted the permission thus granted, and led the way.

It was delightful to exchange the oppressive atmosphere of the perfumed drawing-room, and the sharp tongues of the Ladies Manners and Beatrice Hauton for the cool evening air, the rustling leaves, and twittering of the swallows. Ellen stopped to gather a rose which still bloomed in a shady place, while Kate, attracted by the beauty of a gaudy-winged moth, chased it in its mazy wanderings from flower to flower, and looked like a happy child, as she called to her sister to help her. Again and again the prize seemed within her grasp, one light leap across a narrow flower-border, one spring to the summit of a little hillock and it would be caught. No; it eluded her grasp again and again, till at last she saw it flutter round a bed of scarlet geraniums, then poise itself lightly on a sprig of lavender. Ah! she had it safe now, and resting with the grace of a nymph on one foot, she cautiously bent forward to secure it. As she did so, it again slipped from between her fingers, and flying across a wide ha-ha, took refuge in

the orchard. Excited by her many disappointments, Kate sprang across the broad ditch. Too late; the beautiful bright insect was gone beyond recall, but the orchard, with its fruit-laden boughs and cool turf walks, was so deliciously refreshing, that instead of returning to the house, as she ought to have done, she wandered up and down the long straight alleys, watching the streaks of crimson that still lingered in the western sky, thinking how often she and Harry had done so together, and what bright cloud-castles they had built together, and now where were they gone?—vanished like their prototypes, leaving no trace behind.

And whose was the fault, his or hers? Conscience hinted hers. She had not thought so once. She had formerly believed that he had no right to take her to task for anything she chose to do. Mrs. Egerton had always told her that if girls do not make a stand against a husband's authority before marriage they become perfect slaves afterwards; and though she thought differently in many respects from her mother, still on this particular point she had believed she was right.

She began to doubt it now. She scarcely knew how it was, but the few weeks Ellen had spent at home had made her alter many of her opinions; and yet it was odd that her sister had gained such influence over her, for she neither scolded her nor talked at her as her mother did—never called her an idiot, or a silly child, as her father often did when annoyed at her folly; and never made her feel herself in disgrace, as Judith and Mrs. Dashwood had the faculty of doing.

Indeed, Ellen never even gave her good advice, but, somehow, she contrived in common conversation to suggest good thoughts, to propose high motives of action, to imbue her unconsciously with a more lofty standard of duty, to make her feel that what she did ought to be done not to please man, but God. Certainly Ellen was the most charming of good people. She did not frighten one into being good, but pointed out the right way so gently that one could not choose but follow it.

"Oh, if Judith would but ask me to go with Ellen to Warneford next month! If she would but give me one more chance of seeing Harry all would be well!"

As Kate came to this conclusion, she suddenly remembered how long she had been absent, and the glancing lights from the Manor showed her that the drawing-room was already lighted up, so she made her way back as quickly as she could. She was about to enter by the conservatory, which was open, but the sounds of whispering voices and the glimmer of a white dress among the leaves withheld her, and caused her to advance hastily towards the window by which she had quitted the house. Before she was out of hearing, however, she recognized Lord de Rochefort's voice, saying, in the most impressive manner :—"You taught me I still had a heart." And with a smile at having been the unseen auditor of such a sentimentalism from the ancient Adonis, she turned away. At the same moment Ellen's sweet voice was heard from the music-room, singing "*Nasce di vago Aprile,*" and Kate hurried towards the drawing-room to hear her favourite song more distinctly. She entered by the window through which she had quitted it ; but her intention of passing through it unobserved was frustrated, for a group of people, consisting of Lady Manners, the two Hautons, the Elphinstones, and Mr. Trevillian were gathered round the tea-table, near the curtained entrance to the music-room. They were talking so earnestly that Kate's entrance was not remarked, although it was impossible to pass them unseen. As she stood in the window, uncertain whether to advance or retreat, she heard young Trevillian say :—

"It is the most disagreeable business that has happened for many a day. Quite a disgrace to the county. And he contrived to keep such a smooth face, too."

"Had I known it three hours sooner," Lady Manners remarked, "I should have made Sir Edmund write and decline the *pleasure* of seeing him here. But it was quite too late. I wish Mr. Hutton had given us a hint of the truth a little earlier."

"Why, you see, I scarcely could. Suspicion was strong, but one had no proofs, and one detests being mixed up in a thing of that kind. Of course, when our ball was in question, I could hint to him not to show in our house till all was made straight ; but I felt bound in honour not to commit him further till it was absolutely certain."

"Who would have imagined a peer of the realm could have behaved in so rascally a manner?" murmured young Trevillian.

"I suppose," said Colonel Elphinstone, "his reception at dinner was too marked for even him to misunderstand. He vanished as soon as the ladies did."

"Sir Edmund was most touchingly thankful for his evasion," Mr. Trevillian again murmured.

"And I am sure I am," said Lady Manners, heartily. "I was quite uncomfortable to leave him behind, but I knew that most of you could keep your tempers;" and she cast an approving look at Colonel Elphinstone.

"A man has to learn that in the army," he said, modestly; "but I confess it was a relief when we found him gone. I do not think we shall see more of him in the county."

"I am not quite so sure of that," Lady Manners replied. "The Egertons as yet know nothing—that was evident from the way Kate talked to him. I don't like the girl, but I will do her the justice to believe she would not have done so had she known what we know."

"How well Miss Delancy behaved," said Mrs. Elphinstone; "it was a difficult position for her, yet she steered her course admirably."

"Adelaide is a good girl," said her aunt with animation, "and always does what I tell her. It was particularly trying for her, however; for you know he has, of late, paid her the greatest attention, and one must confess he can make himself most exceedingly agreeable. Any other than Adèle would long ere this have had her head completely turned by his attentions."

"Well," Lady Beatrice remarked, "I suppose he was agreeable. Everybody said so, but I confess I never liked him, and I was not at all surprised to find out what he really was; though, of course, I never supposed him to be so very bad."

"I wish," said gentle Mrs. Elphinstone, "some kind friend would put Mr. Egerton on his guard; I cannot bear to think that those two charming girls should have any further acquaintance with such a man."

"Why," said Mr. Hauton with a grin, "you might as well set fire to tinder as enlighten Mr. Egerton; he would explode

like gunpowder. He has no more control over his temper than a baby. He would fancy Lord de Rochefort and all of us had combined to insult him ; would call us out one after the other——”

“Frederick, Frederick, keep within bounds !” Lady Beatrice exclaimed ; “though if that man, as was once hinted, really intended to offer his empty coronet to one of the girls, Mr. Egerton is, I think, well entitled to consider it an insult.”

Lady Manners said something here Kate could not follow, about “fresh gilding” and “debts of honour,” at which they all laughed, till Lady Beatrice stooped forward and, craning her long neck until her lips almost touched Lady Manners’s ear, she whispered a few words, which caused a general catching of the breath among the whole group, while the word “impossible !” was uttered in every different tone and key of astonishment and dismay.

“Well, that is too bad,” young Trevillian said ; “I believed he was a blackleg, but not so thorough a black-guard.”

Kate had for some time felt wretchedly uncomfortable at being the unseen auditor of this conversation, and was cogitating how she could retrace her steps unperceived, or find her way into the music-room unobserved, when Lady Manners suddenly started up, exclaiming with real alarm,—

“Is it not odd that Adelaide and the Miss Egertons have not returned from the garden ? It is getting very dark ; I don’t like this long absence.”

“I saw Miss Egerton go to the music-room with Sir Edmund and Sir Francis Vere.”

“And the others ?”

“I am here, Lady Manners,” said Kate, boldly advancing towards the table, “and should be glad if you would give me a cup of tea.”

A startled glance passed from one to the other of the assembled party. “Where did you leave Adelaide ?” Lady Manners asked.

“I have not seen her.” And with as much composure as she could, she related her own adventures. Her story was listened to in solemn silence ; it was evidently only half believed by most of her hearers.

"And now," she said, determined to learn the meaning of all the hints she had heard, "and now may I ask of whom you were talking when I came in?"

"When did you come in?" Lady Manners inquired, growing very red.

"Five minutes ago. I did not like to break in upon your conversation; and while waiting for a favourable opportunity of interrupting you, I overheard a few sentences. Will you explain them to me?"

No one ventured to answer.

"Mrs. Elphinstone, you spoke kindly of my sister and me, will you tell me?"

"My dear, it is an ugly story, not fit for you to hear?"

"Yet you said you wished some one would warn us?"

"So I did; but still——"

"Do not hesitate to speak out, Mrs. Elphinstone," said Lady Manners, recovering herself; "it is right she should hear it. Your particular friend Lord de Rochefort, Miss Kate, has just been proved totally unfit for the society of gentlemen, still more so for that of ladies. If you wish to hear particulars, you may; but——"

"No, no," said Mr. Hauton and Colonel Elphinstone in a breath; "you have said quite enough."

"We were told only half an hour before dinner. We believed he would not venture to show his face. You had yourself a proof how cool and impudent he can be; let me, therefore, advise you, as a friend, to have nothing more to do with him," said Lady Manners, rather dictatorially.

"I shall follow your advice implicitly," Kate said very gravely, though an angry flush rose to her cheek to hear herself spoken to in such a tone. "I believe I shall find my sister in the music-room," she added, as, with a sweeping bow, she gave her empty cup into Mr. Hauton's hand and moved slowly away.

"I don't believe a word against that girl," he muttered, as she disappeared behind the curtained door; "she has far too much sense to be imposed on by such a regular old humbug."

"I hope so," Lady Manners said very coolly.

Ellen was at the piano when Kate entered, with Sir Edmund Manners seated by her and pressing her to sing

many old songs which he used to like when he was younger—and happier. Sir Francis Vere was turning over some new book on the table at the other end of the room. Ellen paused a moment in her song to inquire of Kate the result of her chase of the butterfly, and then resumed her singing. Sir Francis, with the familiarity of old friendship, called Kate to him, and said a little gravely, but with a kind smile on his face the while,—

“Tell me, Kate, were you all the time chasing that moth?”

“Really, cousin Frank, you are very impertinent to ask such a question,” she said blushing, she knew not why.

“I know I am; but I have a reason for it.”

“Well, I was. Have you any objection? do you wish, as you used to do long ago, to scold me for being so babyish? or rebuke me for going out without a bonnet?”

“No, Kate, neither one nor other; but I do wish to tell you something I have heard to-day, and which has vexed me very much.”

“What is it?”

“That there is an acquaintance of yours who is not what you believe; that he has appeared to you in borrowed plumes——”

“You mean Lord de Rochefort,” she answered hastily.

“I do. Why did you suppose it was he?”

“I have just been hearing some new views of his character enunciated in the next room,” she said rather bitterly.

“And you believe them?”

“I suppose I must, though really I could scarcely make out what was wrong.”

“He has done that which will make him chased from society.”

“So they hinted.”

“You speak, Kate, as if that were a matter of no consequence.”

“I do not feel it so. I think it is a matter of very great consequence to lose so pleasant an acquaintance.”

“Kate, Kate, how can you be so reckless? How can you pretend that you would, if you could, continue to associate with a man who—who——” he hesitated.

Kate looked at him keenly. “Cousin Frank,” she said,

"did you really think Kate Egerton so changed as to allow of the most distant shadow of an acquaintance with one who had derogated in the slightest degree from the character of a gentleman?"

"I did not, Kate; and yet——" again he hesitated, then said resolutely, "and yet how could I tell how you might act, when you pique yourself on doing exactly the contrary to what others do?"

Kate blushed. "It is true," she said, "that I do not like to yield to mere empty clamour; but it is a different matter when it comes to questions of right and wrong. I were no true woman did I continue to uphold one whose conduct is such as his seems to be."

"I am rejoiced to find you can say this so heartily."

"What do you mean to imply by that remark?"

"There is no need to mince the matter, Kate: I had been told that in my absence you had been much together, and people naturally supposed that there was some truth in the report he took care to spread that he was to marry one of the Misses Egerton. I knew it could not be Ellen——"

"And so chose to imagine it was I? Oh, cousin Frank, how could *you* believe me so forgetful—so wicked? you who knew of my engagement to Harry? But I dare say I deserved it; I ought not to have behaved as I did. Harry warned me I should find out my mistake some day; I have done so."

"Don't take it so much to heart now, Kate; the danger, if danger there were, is past."

"Yes, thank Heaven, it is! But, believe me, this will be a lesson to me; I almost think it will make me give up flirting. Yet 'tis a pity too, for it is very pleasant to flirt," she added, with her old merry laugh.

"Pleasant, but wrong," he said.

"Ah, cousin Frank, what a Mentor you are! But I see Ellen is ready to go—is it not charming to have her home again? I do believe she will make me a good child in the end—her sweet, calm face seems to do every one good; only look at Sir Edmund, how happy he is talking to her."

Had she glanced at her cousin, she would have seen how fully he felt the influence of Ellen's presence, but she was not thinking of cousin Frank just then.

The sisters were both silent on their drive home; but before they retired to rest Kate went to her sister's room, anxious to talk over with her the events of the day.

"May I come in, Ellen? But you are busy?"

"No, love; only reading a letter Frank brought me from Mary."

"What charming letters she writes!"

"Indeed she does." She said no more, but carefully locked the letter into her portfolio.

"Has not this been a wretched day, Ellen?"

"Not to me, Kate; on the contrary, it has brought me such pleasant news that I shall ever esteem it one of the happiest of my life."

"To me it has seemed the most disagreeable, mortifying, uncomfortable one I ever spent."

"Indeed, Kate! tell me how."

"Tell me, first, do you know anything about Lord de Rochefort that you have not told me?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"Will you tell it me?"

"If you insist upon it I shall;" and, in as few words as possible, she gave her a sketch of poor Madeline Gascoigne's story, but avoided everything that could show how it had been associated with her own sadder history.

"And that is all you know?"

"Not all; but I had rather not tell you the rest."

"I beg you will; I have heard so much to-night that a little more here or there can make no difference."

There was such a seriousness about Kate's questioning that Ellen at once complied with her request. But when Kate heard of his having offered her his hand she grew almost wild with indignation.

"If I were a man," she said, "I would make him pay for his impertinence. To dare to ask you to marry him!" and, with a rapidity of utterance which made it difficult to follow the sense of what she said, Kate told her what she had heard.

Ellen drew a long breath, as she exclaimed, "I am almost glad you have learned this."

"Glad, Ellen?"

"Not glad that he is so wicked, but that, being so, you

should have it made quite distinct to your mind that he is so. I am glad that you should be quite convinced that Harry was right with regard to him, and that you were wrong."

"I don't quite allow either. I think that Harry made a great mistake in assuming the dictator to me. If he had said to me, gently and kindly, 'Kate, I wish you would not become intimate with Fascination,' I should have given in at once. But when he came up to me, looking as black as a thundercloud, and said, 'You are not to waltz with Lord de Rochefort,' of course I was angry. How could I suppose that he knew more of him than I did?"

"Men have means we have not of knowing the real nature of other men," said Ellen quietly.

"Perhaps—still I don't think he was right, though I might be wrong. However, it is too late to think of that now; he went abroad in the sulks, and who knows when we may meet again? Now that Mrs. Dashwood is gone to Warneford, and Chevely is deserted, there is no chance of his coming to Heddlesham for months, perhaps years."

"But, though he does not come to Heddlesham, could not you accompany me in October to Warneford? Mrs. Dashwood wishes it, and so do her son and daughter."

"Her son wishes it?"

"I mean Lord Warneford does," Ellen answered.

"Ah! I knew Harry would not come round so soon. Still, if they wish it, I will go."

Kate said it with an effort; it was a great sacrifice of her pride to do so, but she was beginning to feel that it was very wretched not to be on good terms with Harry, whom she had looked up to and *loved* all her life.

Ellen kissed her fondly. "That is my own brave Kate; I am sure you will never regret having taken this step."

"But, Ellen, now that that is settled, tell me, do you think a man is entitled to compel his wife to do what he wishes? Is it right to expect that she is to give up all and he nothing?"

"I do not think it is the case in rational married life," Ellen said, with a smile. "I know that it is a question often mooted, but it seems to me that it would be a privilege to have the power of giving up everything for the sake of those we love."

"Oh, Ellen, you are romantic."

"Is it romance, Kate, that tells us that woman was made a helpmate for man, and that wives are to be in subjection to their husbands?" she said gravely.

"Ah, Ellen, I don't like the *word* subjection, but perhaps I might learn to endure the *thing*. I sometimes fancy it would be pleasant to be guided, but, you know, there is a difference between guiding and driving."

" 'In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife.' "

Is that what you are thinking of, Kitten? But remember that the way to make our life sublime is to do our duty, whatever it is; and the wife's duty is comprehended in this, 'Let the wife see that she reverence her husband'—that word 'reverence' implies everything."

"Reverence!" repeated Kate. "Well, I prefer it to 'obey,' and certainly if we reverence people there is no occasion to be driven by them. We anticipate their wishes, desire to think as they do, act as they would like us to act, help them where we can, serve them, love them. Yes, Ellen, 'reverence' is a grand word. 'I thank thee, Jew, I thank thee for that word,'" she said with a merry laugh; but there was a tear resting on her long eyelash the while, which showed Ellen she had not spoken in vain.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE ELOPEMENT.

‘When God is distributing sorrows to you, the sorrows still come on some errands ; therefore, the best way for you to find that they do not come in His anger is, to consider what the errands may be.’

COTTON MATHER.

“There is no accounting for the fancies of young people, one sees such marriages.”

E. HAMILTON.

No sooner was Kate gone, than Ellen took once more from her portfolio the little note which Sir Francis had brought her from his sister. A letter from Mrs. Beaumont was always welcome, but this was peculiarly precious to her, bringing, as it did, the confirmation of a hope which she had cherished through the uncertainty of years.

She was changed in many most essential points ; but there was this peculiarity in her altered character, that old thoughts, feelings, and interests subsisted still as the acting motives of her life, but so purified by the new atmosphere in which she lived, so spiritualized by more constant communion with higher and holier influences, that they were as unlike their former selves as the grub is to the butterfly—the same, and yet different.

This was especially the case in all that related to Reginald Stanhope—the past was not forgotten, her interest in him was as deep now as it had been in the days of her passionate idolatry, but it was now an unselfish, purified interest, one more eager for his eternal welfare than for his earthly happiness—one from which she entirely dissociated herself. She never wished to see him again in this world, but most earnestly did she hope and pray that they might meet in that which is to come.

Only Mrs. Beaumont and cousin Frank knew her real story, but to them her meek resignation to her appointed lot, and her child-like faith in God’s mercy through Christ, seemed

to prove that she was not far from the kingdom of heaven ; and though she judged herself far less leniently than they did, she now knew where to find the peace and rest she had long sought in vain.

At first the agony of her terror, the wildness of her despair, were overpowering, as, racked by mental and bodily pain, she tossed restlessly on her fevered couch. Dread of her father's anger to herself and of his vengeance on Reginald, filled her mind ; anxiety, grief, and remorse by turns oppressed her, and it was not till her physical strength entirely failed her that these fearful visions ceased to torment her.

Then came a long trance of exhaustion, which left no trace on her mind save one, and that, most unaccountably, was a text of Scripture, which, coming she knew not whence, seemed to haunt her perpetually, to ring in her ears, and float before her eyes. It was this, "Be still and know that I am God." It was not one with which she had hitherto been familiar, though she must have seen it frequently in the Psalms of the day ; perhaps Mr. Jones or Mrs. Beaumont had read it by her sick-bed when she was scarcely conscious of what she heard ; but however the words reached her outward senses, they stole by degrees into her inmost soul, shedding a deep peace on her whole being, and teaching her how *only* the rest she sought was to be acquired.

Like seed sown in fertile ground, these eight words brought forth great fruit—first patience, then hope, and finally faith. She believed at length what she had often heard but never fully understood till now, that out of the greatest evil that befalls us God is able to bring greater good than we can conceive, and she earnestly prayed that Reginald and her great sorrow might in the end prove their greatest gain.

In due time her prayer for herself was heard, and by-and-by she had reason to believe that the still more earnest one for him was heard also.

The first good news she heard of him was that on quitting the army he had resumed his student life at Oxford, but had added theology to the scientific and classical subjects which had formerly been his delight. Then it was rumoured that he was studying for the Church ; but after that she lost sight of him. During her residence abroad Mrs. Beaumont wrote that his letters to Dr. Black and Sir Francis became less

frequent and more reserved, and at last that they had entirely ceased. Sir Francis went to Oxford to make inquiries, and was told that Mr. Stanhope had gone either to Ireland or Scotland, but with what intentions no one knew. For two years nothing more was heard of him, when by chance Ellen observed in a paper of old date which had accidentally fallen into her hands while in Rome that the wonderful preaching of a Rev. Mr. Stanhope had made a great sensation in one of the northern manufacturing towns. The notice was short, and while a few points which were mentioned seemed to tally with Reginald's peculiarities, others were so opposed to her knowledge of his character that she almost feared that it could not be he who was described. She asked Lady Warneford, with whom she then was, whether she thought it possible?

"Oh no," she said decidedly. "Lord Warneford learned from good authority that he went two years ago to the Bermudas, or some health-station, with his wife, who is still an invalid. I am quite sure that if he had entered the Church Charles would have heard of it, for our friend and neighbour, young Howard, is almost the only one of his former acquaintances with whom Captain Stanhope continues to correspond."

"Will you write to Mr. Howard and make inquiries? I should really like to know what has become of him!"

"Yes, and of her, poor little thing. How fragile she looked when I saw her last. I never expected she would live."

"You liked her, did you not?" and Ellen listened eagerly for the answer; she did so earnestly desire to have her own favourable impression of Terese confirmed.

"Like her? Yes, I dare say I did, but really, Ellen, I must confess I was thinking at the time I knew her far more of my dear Charles than of any one else."

Ellen pressed the subject no further, but she wrote to Mrs. Beaumont to make the necessary inquiries. They were for some time unsuccessful. All they could discover was that a clergyman of the name of Stanhope had been curate for some time in one of the worst parts of Manchester—that in which Angelmeadow is situated,—that he had done an immense deal of good there, rousing an interest in the minds of the working classes with regard to religion, and becoming a real favourite with the poor, while the rich,

attracted by the force and eloquence of his preaching, had crowded to the hitherto obscure church; but he had left it six months before, and had gone none knew whither. He was very reserved, people said; no one knew anything of his private concerns; he was only known as an excellent and most unwearied parish priest, a most earnest, soul-stirring preacher, but one who, avoiding the common error of popular preachers, drew souls to God by the cords of love, rather than the terrors of judgment.

Time passed on; Ellen returned to England, and learned that Sir Francis Vere was from home. She partly guessed why he was absent, but not till she met him at Manners Manor—not till she had read Mrs. Beaumont's note, did she fully comprehend how much he had exerted himself to find out the truth for her. Unwearied in his search, he had traced Reginald from place to place, and had at last seen and talked with him. It was he whose name had caught Ellen's eye; and when Sir Francis ventured to express to him how much he had been touched by the warm eulogiums passed upon him by those whom his earnestness, and the consistency of his practice with his teaching, had prompted to tread the path he trode, he said, with humble gratitude,—

“Never, my dear Vere, limit God's power and mercy; for can anything be more wonderful than that he should have called me to preach His Holy Gospel, have permitted my voice to influence the salvation of others, and, wonder of wonders, have given me some little power over the corruption of my own heart?”

This, and a few words of comfort and hope to Ellen, such as befitted a minister of Christ to send to an old friend, were the tidings that made that “long day” at the Mannesers one of the most blissful of her life—a white-stoned day in her calendar. And to-morrow she should hear more. Cousin Frank had promised to come early, and tell her all that he was permitted to tell of Reginald's daily life. As to his residence, it was a temporary one, in an obscure village, from whence he was on the point of removing, a kind friend having offered him a cure in a quiet pastoral district, which would suit him and his poor afflicted wife far better than a town. Then Terese still lived? How she longed to hear more of her, of him, of Evelyn!

The next morning was wet : one of those soaking, pitiless days which depress the spirits of most people, and drive a sportsman well nigh distracted. The wind howled mournfully through the trees, the saturated leaves whirled wet and withered to the ground, and the rain came down with that steady plash-plash, which to none but an ardent youngster could promise "a bag" of any kind. Therefore Ellen was not surprised that even Sir Francis Vere, weather-proof as he was, failed to keep his appointment early. But when the whole of that day and the greater part of the next went by without his coming, she began to feel alarmed. He was studiously exact in keeping any promise, however trivial, and experience had taught her that he considered nothing trivial that gave her pleasure. Dear, kind cousin Frank, how faithful and gentle a heart beat in that rugged bosom ; how bitterly she regretted that he was constant to a faith which could never meet its reward on earth !

"I tell you what it is, Ellen," said Mr. Egerton, when the third morning dawned without news of his favourite, "I shall ride over immediately after breakfast and see what is going on at Vere Court. It is not like Frank to let three days pass without coming to see us."

Hardly had he spoken, when the door opened and Sir Francis entered, looking travel-stained and exhausted.

"Kate, dear, give me a cup of coffee," was his first speech after having shaken hands all round, but without answering the many questions poured upon him ; "I am regularly beaten."

"You look like it, Frank. Where have you been to knock you up at so early an hour ?" asked Mr. Egerton.

"I can speak now," he said, pushing back his chair from the table ; "but I was exhausted and faint when I came in. They asked me to breakfast at the Manor, but I preferred coming on here. I could not stand that unhappy woman's lamentations."

"What are you talking of ?" "Where have you been, Frank ?" "Certainly you are the most provoking answerer of a question," said the three ladies at once.

"Talking of ? Bless my soul, you did not get my note, then ? Why I have been off to Gretna Green, and I can tell you it is no joke to travel all that way and back with a poor wretched fellow, half out of his senses with grief and terror."

"Then there was no lady in the case, Sir Francis?" said Mrs. Egerton, as gravely as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her cousin to have gone to Gretna Green on his own account.

Kate laughed; she could not help it. Sir Francis's face looked so wretched, so completely out of keeping with the position in which Mrs. Egerton placed him. He looked at her a little angrily,—

"Indeed, Kate, it is no laughing matter. The short and the long of the story is this:—As I was taking leave of Manners some ten minutes after you left the other evening, a waiting-maid rushed in as pale as a sheet, to inform her mistress that Miss Adelaide was not to be found, and that they feared that she had gone off with Lord de Rochefort."

"Impossible!"

"So we all said; but when inquiries were made, everything seemed to confirm the story. Some one had seen her steal out of the house in her walking-dress a short time previously; Lord de Rochefort was known to have been hanging about the Manor long after he was supposed to have left it."

"That is quite true," exclaimed Kate, quite thrown off her guard.

"How do you know, Kate?" said her father, with a quick angry glance at her.

"I chanced to overhear him speaking to some one in the conservatory. What I did hear showed me the conversation was private, and so I passed on. It never occurred to me *then* that there was any impropriety in his addressing Miss Delancy."

"Explain yourself, Kate," said her father sternly.

"Oh, cousin Frank, do you tell papa—I cannot!"

"It is a bad story," Sir Francis said; "worse than Kate knows." And drawing Mr. Egerton aside, he whispered a few words in his ear. The blood rose to the old man's cheeks, his eyes flashed, his hands clenched.

"The villain!" he said. "And this man has presumed to enter my house, has been received as an honoured guest, has associated with my family, on terms of intimacy with my wife and daughters. Charlotte! Charlotte! I can hardly forgive you for exposing me to such a disgrace, by your silly vanity; and yours too, Kate, you would insist——"

"Hush, hush, my dear sir! Kate was no more to blame than we were—not so much, indeed. To the pure all things are pure, and I know she has suffered bitterly since she was made aware of—of—not half what I have told you."

Kate took her cousin's hand, and pressed it cordially. "Good, kind Frank, you are a friend indeed!" Alas! he had often before now screened her from her father's sudden bursts of anger.

"I don't understand what you are all talking about," said Mrs. Egerton, pettishly; "I don't see why, though a man has been a little unlucky at play or on the turf, that he should be spoken of as——"

"Hush, Charlotte, you don't know what you are saying," interrupted her husband, as, rising from his chair, he paced up and down the room like a caged lion. "Had you had the commonest degree of penetration you would have——but," he added, as he caught Ellen's eye turned anxiously on him, "but, as Frank says, I was even a greater fool myself, so I am not entitled to blame you. Don't look so frightened, darling; you, at least, were free from blame in this matter," he continued more gently still, as he passed his hand caressingly over her pale cheek. "Now, let us hear the end of Frank's story."

"When there could no longer be a doubt of Miss Delancy's elopement, Lady Manners became almost mad with rage. She raved against her niece, Lord de Rochefort, and her innocent husband—called them all the dreadful names it is possible to conceive, and finally went off in strong hysterics. I never believed till then I should have listened without compassion to a woman's screams, but there was something so utterly selfish and unfeminine in her whole conduct, that all my pity was reserved for poor Sir Edmund, who wept like a child at the loss of her whom he loved as a daughter."

"Poor fellow!"

"Ay, poor indeed," said Mr. Egerton, contemptuously. "Had he had the heart of a man he would have mounted the fleetest horse in his stables, followed the blackguard, and shot him dead as ruthlessly as he would have destroyed any other destructive vermin."

Sir Francis, as if he did not hear the muttered words,

went on. "I could not leave him in such a state, helpless and alone. I suggested to him it might not yet be too late to follow them, and prevent the marriage. He listened to me with rapture. 'I would give half I possess,' he exclaimed, 'to save Adèle from such a fate.' Well, he trusted everything to me, and we set off. We travelled all night before we came upon their traces. The next day we found they had only a few miles the start of us, and we reached Gretna just too late: the ceremony was over."

Ellen's cheek grew paler and paler as with much feeling he described Sir Edmund's grief, Adelaide's half repentant, half exultant reception of him, and Lord de Rochefort's cool effrontery.

"And you kept your temper, Frank?" asked Mr. Egerton.

"What could be done? However irregular, the marriage was legal enough, and we knew well that to irritate him would only draw down misery on her. But the scene that followed was trying. It appears that he took this step to secure her little fortune, which circumstances had made a matter of importance to him; but he had been deceived as to its amount, and on learning how little it was, he had the impertinence to propose to Sir Edmund to give up the lady on condition that he received her five thousand pounds at once, adding, with a sneer, that it was a trifling price to pay for a coronet. I never saw Sir Edmund show to more advantage. Deep feeling made him shake off for the time every petty affectation, and there was dignity as well as true benevolence in the appeal he made to Adelaide to return with him, to make his house her home, and to leave one who so little appreciated the sacrifice she had made for him."

"I trust she yielded!" Ellen exclaimed.

"Alas, no! The poor girl obstinately refused to leave him. It was impossible to compel her, and so they sail to-night for France, banished for ever from home and friends."

"Poor Adelaide," said Kate, feelingly, "I fear that in her place I should have done so too. Nothing could have induced me to return to Lady Manners after such an elopement."

Sir Francis was silent, but he looked as if there were some reason in what she said. And the event proved it was so.

The ill-assorted union turned out as wretchedly for poor

Adelaide as every one feared ; she found herself the drudge, the slave, the ill-used victim of a thoroughly bad man. At length a disgraceful duel ended in the death of her tyrant, and she returned to England at the age of two-and-twenty, a faded, broken-spirited, helpless creature. She desired then to place herself under the protection of her aunt ; but she indignantly refused to have anything to do with her, and advised her husband to follow her example. Sir Edmund refused to obey her on this one point ; he sought out a home for the poor thing with kind, good people ; he supported, cheered, and comforted her during the few short months that she lingered on earth ; and it was he who raised in the churchyard of Heddlesham the simple marble tablet with the inscription—

ADELAIDE, BARONESS DE ROCHEFORT,

Aged 23.

He hath delivered me out of trouble.

CHAPTER XL

WARNEFORD CASTLE.

"Heaven pity him who shall have one day a creature so beautiful to delight him and a thing so mischievous to torment him."

WALTER SCOTT.

It was a fine evening towards the end of October when Ellen and Kate Egerton came within sight of the old castle of Warneford. The ivied walls and gloomy donjon-keep stood out in high relief against the court ; the autumn wind whistled through the boughs of the fine trees, and made a melancholy music ; while the curfew-bell from the village church chimed softly and pleasantly on the ear.

"Ellen," exclaimed Kate, suddenly breaking a long silence, "I don't feel half comfortable at the thought of this visit. I am so afraid lest I should do or say something that they may take up amiss. So long as I was a child they encouraged my little follies ; but now Judith looks at everything I do *en noir*, and even dear Mrs. Dashwood seems to fear that Harry has chosen very ill."

"I think, Kate, you allow your fancy to get the better of your good sense sometimes. I am sure that both Judith and her mother would regret deeply should anything break off your engagement with Harry."

"Really—you think so really and truly! Then, Ellen, I shall 'go forward to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a manly heart,' as Longfellow has it; that is, if there are no other visitors at Warneford save ourselves. If there are, to a moral certainty Judith will discover that I am too talkative, or too silent, or too forward, or—something or other that is wrong."

"Dear Kate, do not trouble yourself with what others will think of you; but do what you feel and know is right. Be true to yourself, natural, lively, and kind-hearted, and everybody will love and admire you as I do."

"God bless you, Ellen, you are a good comforter," Kate said with emotion; "and, at all events, I have you to come to in every difficulty. I know you will guide me right, and so—— But see, there is Bevis, Harry's dog. Dear, dear Bevis!" and the tears that sparkled in her black eyes showed Ellen that whatever she might pretend, Bevis's master had a strong hold on her heart; and she thought that his mother and sister made a grievous mistake in not taking her advice and recalling Harry at once to England.

"Ellen," Kate said at length, taking her sister's hand, whose extreme coldness showed how deep was her emotion, "Ellen, have they brought me here on false pretences? Is Harry at Warneford?"

"No, Kate, he is not."

A deep sigh was Kate's only answer. Ellen put her arm gently round her. "Did you wish it very much, darling?"

"I cannot express how much. We parted in anger, and I shall never be happy till I tell him I was wrong and he right."

"Will you tell Judith so?"

"Never!" and the softened expression passed from her countenance as rapidly as the sunset glow disappeared beneath the heavy cloud which at the moment was whirled by the rising autumn blast across the western heavens, and in an instant turned the twilight into darkness. "I am ready to acknowledge my faults to Harry himself, but I shall never condescend to do so to his sister."

It was now Ellen's turn to sigh ; but a sudden turn of the avenue brought them in face of the castle ; another instant, and they were warmly welcomed by Lord Warneford, who still maintained in full force the characteristics which had made Kate, when still as a child, give him the title of "the honest man."

His greeting of Ellen was almost womanly, in his tender anxiety lest she should have suffered from her fatiguing journey. To Kate it was quite different ; but so frank, so hearty, so *empressé*, that she felt *he* at least was glad to see her. Well, after all, the visit might be pleasanter than she expected.

"Judith bade me tell you that she has followed your injunctions to the letter," Lord Warneford said ; "she waited till the clock struck six, and, as you did not come, went to dress. She will be with you in a moment. You *will* let us put off dinner, I hope ? If you are not able to join us, Miss Egerton, your sister will,—won't you, fairy ? (a pet name by which in her childish days he had called Kate.) We shall be much the better for your company,—we have such a preponderance of gentlemen at Warneford just now."

Kate was almost tempted to agree ; but an unusual fit of shyness coming over her, she refused, saying she would rather wait for Ellen, and Lord Warneford was too really courteous to urge her further ; so he drew Ellen's arm within his own, and himself conducted her to the apartment prepared for them. It was a pretty little suite of rooms, opening from the long gallery that skirted the upper end of the entrance-hall, and consisted of several quaint, turreted chambers communicating with each other and looking out on the garden, which a little winding staircase in the smallest turret enabled them to reach without passing through the more public parts of the house.

A bright fire was burning in the little library which formed the anteroom of the whole suite ; a low, comfortable couch was drawn close to it, and close to that a dainty little spider-legged table, with its tea-equipage of that delicate china, brown outside and blue and white in, which used to be so prized in old days.

"How charmingly comfortable!" Ellen exclaimed, sinking down on the tempting-looking sofa. "I see Judith means

to pet me as much as she used to do when we were abroad together."

Lord Warneford rubbed his hands with satisfaction. "She thought you would like these rooms. And now don't hurry, you have lots of time before we get through that long business of dinner. But is this all you want? nothing more solid?"

"Nothing, thank you."

He left the room; and Kate unfastened Ellen's wraps, tenderly placed the cushions for her aching head to rest on, and poured out tea; doing everything so quietly, and so lovingly, that had Judith seen her then, half her prejudices against her had vanished; unluckily, however, Kate had retired to her own room before Lady Warneford appeared. She heard the quick, light, and yet decided step move along the polished oak floor of the gallery; she heard the eager voice greeting Ellen with warm, cordial expressions of delight; and then she waited for her turn. Would Judith not welcome her also? She felt tempted to go to her; but the same unwonted shyness came back upon her again, and she resolved to wait and see how Judith would behave to her before she committed herself by any show of the affection she really felt. On her conduct she would model her own, and with a full heart, but a determination not to show how earnestly she wished to be cherished by Harry's family, she began to busy herself in the duties of her toilet. She had not, however, advanced very far, when a light tap at her door made her heart beat fast.

"Come in," and in an instant she found herself clasped, not in Judith's arms, but in Mrs. Dashwood's.

"My child, I am so glad to see you again!" and these few words were spoken so from Mrs. Dashwood's heart, that Kate felt a mountain removed from hers.

An instant afterwards the gong sounded for dinner. "You will find me in the drawing-room, Kate, as soon as you are ready," Mrs. Dashwood said, as she left her. "Judith does not force me to sit out the whole long dinner. Adieu, my love!"

She was leaving by one door, when Lady Warneford entered by the other, and exclaimed,—

"You here, mamma! How imprudent to over-fatigue

yourself." And then, turning to Kate, she said cordially enough, though hurriedly, "I am glad you are come, Kate ;" and she stooped forward and kissed her. "Now I must run away, I am late as it is."

The mother's and daughter's greetings were similar in words, but in manner so different that Kate went down to the drawing-room with her heart filled with love to the one and with—not hate but—doubt towards the other.

When Lady Warneford entered the drawing-room after dinner, she found Ellen reclining in a large arm-chair near the fire, looking worn and exhausted, while Kate was seated on a footstool at Mrs. Dashwood's feet, her white arm resting lovingly on the old lady's knee, and her large black eyes twinkling with merriment as she recounted all the gossip of Heddlesham for Mrs. Dashwood's entertainment, and by her lively sallies and the quaint remarks she made on persons and things causing her to laugh heartily. She rose, however, on Judith's entrance, and curtsied very gravely, in recognition of the Mrs. Thorpe and Miss Graham, who were introduced to her. Her politeness was returned by the elder lady with a sudden quick bow, as she deposited her huge person in the corner of the sofa next Mrs. Dashwood, to whom she began to talk with great rapidity, and by a remarkably low reverence from the other, who, as if anxious not to lose an instant of precious time, took her place at the table and drew from her reticule an intricate piece of crochet-work, to which she devoted herself with praiseworthy assiduity.

"That seems a very difficult pattern," Kate said, seating herself by her, and carelessly turning over the books of prints on the table before her.

"It is rather difficult."

"Does it not try your eyes?"

"A little."

"May I look at it? It really is beautifully worked. For what is it intended, may I ask?"

"Oh, indeed, I don't know. Trimming, perhaps."

"And shall you be long in finishing it?"

"I dare say I shall, it requires such close attention. I cannot get on if any one speaks to me."

Kate's polite attempts at conversation were rather dashed

by this rebuff, and after one or two other ineffectual efforts at conversation she gave it up in despair. How fast Judith and Ellen were talking. How she should like to join them. She would have been glad even to be able to hear one or two of Mrs. Thorpe's mysterious whispers to Mrs. Dashwood, she felt so dull, so unusually knocked up. What could be the matter with her? At last it occurred to her—unromantic thought—that she was very hungry! Her long journey had obliged her to breakfast early, and the delicate slices of bread and butter which they had on their arrival, along with their tiny cups of tea, had not satisfied her healthy appetite. Would the possibility of this being the case occur to Judith she wondered. Ah, there was a sound like the ring of China and silver.

The door opened, and the coffee-tray was brought in. Well, the cup of strong coffee and wafer biscuit were very delicious, certainly, but still, like *Oliver Twist*, she wished for more, although she had not the courage to ask for it. It was a pity Ellen had so decidedly refused more solid refreshment. Yet it was natural, too. Kate herself had felt little inclined for it when she arrived.

"Perhaps she might get over it if she could find anything to distract her thoughts!" With this idea she took up a pencil which chanced to be on the table, and sketched a fancy portrait of a gentleman on the sheet of paper on which it lay. She had rather a talent for drawing, but at present her sole aim was to give her fingers occupation, and she was scarcely aware of what she had done when the entrance of the gentlemen induced her to throw down her pencil and push her half-finished drawing under one of the caricatures before her. Lord Warneford came up direct to her.

"Well, fairy, I am glad to have you, at last, under my roof. Do you remember, a long, long time ago, when you promised to come and visit me as soon as I had a house of my own?"

"I had forgotten the promise, but am delighted with the performance of it," she said, gaily; "it is a house well worth seeing."

He looked pleased, sat down by her and began to talk, at the same time drawing into the conversation along with him one of the gentlemen who had entered with him. He had

named them all to Kate—Sir Walter Trafford, Mr. Thorpe, Mr. Travers, Mr. Wilmington, and Mr. De l'Orme—"Ethelbert de l'Orme" he had repeated, with a slight emphasis on the rather uncommon name.

Kate was rather near-sighted, therefore she could not decide at one glance to which of the gentlemen in question this particular name belonged, but took it for granted that Ethelbert de l'Orme was the one whom her old friend had specially introduced by making him join their conversation, and when, a few minutes afterwards, Lord Warneford was called away and left them together, she felt quite entitled to go on talking with him. She asked him to explain some of the political caricatures, the then famous H.B.'s, which puzzled her, and he, apparently delighted to be made of use, stood behind her chair, and showed her the most telling points, both political and artistic.

"This is one of the best," he said, stooping across the table to lift the one underneath which Kate's careless sketch lay; but no sooner did his eye fall upon it than, snatching it up and flinging down the other, he exclaimed, "By Jove! this beats 'H. B.' hollow. I never saw anything better in my life. Who could have done it?"

His excitement roused even Miss Graham from her crochet, and she said, "That young lady did it."

"You!" with a look of amazement at Kate. "I beg your pardon for being so rude in expressing my astonishment, but it is the very best caricature I ever saw. It is really extraordinary that a stranger should so immediately have caught the poor fellow's peculiarities—the turn of his head, the *déagé* look of his neckcloth, the very oddness of his tied shoes. You must have known De l'Orme before you saw him to-night."

Kate felt a little mystified, but answered rather haughtily, "I never saw any of the present party except Lord Warneford till this evening;" and she began to tear the sketch which had so innocently excited so much attention.

"Pray don't; it is excellent—it is the very image of Ethelbert de l'Orme. Only look at him—that is he talking to Lady Warneford. Do you not yourself acknowledge the great resemblance?"

Half amused by his excitement, and yet a little annoyed

that anything should have arisen that could give the appearance of too sudden an intimacy with a stranger, and thus confirm Judith's impression of her great accessibility, she blushed as, raising her eyeglass to her eye, she gave one quick look towards the person indicated. "I acknowledge it is an odd resemblance," she said, "but to show you how innocent I was of the intention of sketching Mr. de l'Orme I must tell you that I understood Lord Warneford to have introduced *you* by that name."

"Me! oh dear, no. Never were two people more unlike than De l'Orme and I. Had you mistaken Wilmington for him I could have understood it, for though Wilmington has all his wits about him while De l'Orme hides his talents under a bushel, still in appearance and style, position in the world, and that sort of thing, there is a kind of similarity; but I, you see, am only a harum-scarum younger brother, and that, you know, makes a wonderful difference."

"Perhaps my near-sightedness occasioned my mistake," Kate answered as gravely as if she believed that the advantages to which her new acquaintance alluded could be seen as easily as they were appreciated. "I am, then, to understand that I speak to——"

"Guy Travers," he replied, "a distant cousin of Lord Warneford's."

"And a favourite of his, I should say, from the way in which he addressed you?"

"Well, I believe I am," he said, with a pleasant smile, which displayed a row of white, even teeth; "at least he tells me I may make Warneford my home when I please, and as long as I please; and I don't mind telling you that that is a pretty considerable boon to a poor fellow who—who, in short, has no very happy home of his own to go to."

There was something in this boyish confidence—for Guy Travers looked little more than seventeen—which touched Kate, and she answered him so sympathizingly that he drew a chair beside her, and setting his elbows on the table, began to pour into her ear a full, true, and particular account of "a splendid run" they had had the previous day, ending in the announcement that he was certain she was up to everything, and would like to see the hounds throw off at Benham on

Friday, and that there was a mare in the stable that would carry her like a bird.

He was still in full flow, when Lady Warneford came to ask Kate if she were too tired to give them some music, or if she would rather delay till after tea. Kate hesitated a moment. She had felt for the last ten minutes that Judith's eyes were fixed on her and Mr. Travers, and she suspected, perhaps wrongfully, that this request was partly made to break off a *tête-à-tête* which had lasted quite long enough: so, half out of mischief, she replied—

"No, I cannot say I am too tired——"

"Oh, then, pray favour us," said the excitable Guy, rising from his chair to open the piano.

"But I am very hungry; and, to tell the honest truth, I cannot sing till I have something to eat."

"Hungry, Kate!" exclaimed Lord Warneford, "have they given you no dinner?"

"Why, Charles, you told me they refused anything but tea," said his wife reproachfully.

"Ellen did," Kate replied with a laugh, "but I am far less ethereal than she is."

Lady Warneford was more annoyed by this little *contretemps* than could have been expected from one so self-possessed; but, in truth, her heart smote her a little for the want of cordiality she had shown Kate, and she felt a little inclined to be angry with her in consequence; for it is an ascertained fact that when our consciences prick us we are rather tempted to irritation against the person who has caused us the uncomfortable sensation, than against our own dear selves. However, she gulped down the angry retort, and, instead, busied herself most actively to repair her omission, and so heartily did Kate accept her tardy hospitality, and so merrily did she jest upon her own enormous appetite, that instead of widening the breach between them it lessened it.

As soon as supper—for it really was that old-fashioned meal—was concluded, Kate exclaimed, "Now I feel like a giant refreshed with wine, and will sing as much as you please;" and when the clear young voice rang out,—when the merry face brightened at Lord Warneford's appreciation of her pretty English ballads and sprightly French romances,—when his tastes were more considered than Guy Travers's

demands for German, and Sir Walter Trafford's for Italian ditties, Judith felt her prejudices against Kate fading fast away, for at all events she had shown herself to be thoroughly good-natured and sweet-tempered, even if she were a little wilful. So when the party broke up, and the good-nights were spoken, Judith accompanied her future sister-in-law to her room, and relieved her conscience by repeating in hearty terms that she was very glad she had come to Warneford, and that she hoped she would not find the family party dull.

Kate exerted herself to answer as cordially as she could, and then, with her usual frankness, added, "Don't take it amiss, Judith, if I confess that when I came here first I hoped to have had a glimpse of your brother as well as you. I heard he was expected home, and thought perhaps he might be here."

Lady Warneford was touched by the confession, and said gently, "No, Kate. Harry is still abroad, and returns direct to London for the Michaelmas term. But seeing her look of disappointment, she added, "It is, however, a very short one; and we—that is perhaps—most probably he will come to Warneford about the end of November. You will stay till then, will you not? We should like it so much!"

This from Judith! Kate's eyes filled. "Then, Judith, you do not wish to—to—— You do not really dislike me?"

"Dislike you, dear Kate? Far from it. I have loved you ever since you were an infant. But," with a half-smile, "I have not always quite *approved* of you. Still it is in your power to make me do that also. Will you, Kate?"

Why did she say this? It was injudicious, and she felt it was, as soon as she saw the flash in Kate's eye, and the sudden curl of her lip; but she thought it best to let the matter drop, and bidding her an affectionate good night, left her to her own reflections.

At first these were not agreeable. Kate was of a disposition that yields readily to kindness, but thrusts out its prickles as the hedgehog does when roughly handled, so that Judith's remark, and the way in which she had interrupted her conversation with Guy Travers, had irritated her, and

almost tempted her to pursue her innocent flirtation, from the praiseworthy motive of provoking Lady Warneford. But she luckily remembered that Judith had told her that Harry would be with them in a month. She remembered also that she had looked affectionately at her when she said so, and therefore—yes, therefore, she would do her best to be quite good till then. If she were disappointed? Why then she *would* take to flirting to amuse herself, even if she had nobody to flirt with but old Sir Walter Trafford, the septuagenarian *fanatico per la musica*. But as this thought occurred to her she remembered her last ancient admirer, and with burning cheeks and tearful eyes prayed earnestly that she might be saved from temptation.

Let not any one laugh at such a result of her self-communings. That which is no temptation to one person, is a strong one to others, and there are few snares more common than that into which the Pharisee in the parable fell, despising others and congratulating ourselves on "not being as other men are,"—or as we once heard it quaintly expressed, "trying to macadamize our own road to Heaven with other people's sins."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE ANGEL CHILD.

"Ti vidi fanciulletta,
Quando sul caro viso
Spuntava ingenuo riso,
Interprete del cor."—L. CARRER.

KATE was early astir next morning, and looking from her open turret-window, and espying Lord Warneford, accompanied by Bevis, lounging up and down the terrace, and tempted by the bright sunshine and soft air, she wrapped herself in a huge scarlet Cachemire, and tripping down the winding stair, joined them. Bevis saluted her by placing his forepaws on her shoulder and attempting to lick her face as well as her hands, while Lord Warneford removed his cigar

from his lips, and offered to fling it away if the odour was disagreeable to her.

"I am shocked to say it is not. Perhaps having been so much with Harry in former years has hardened me into an unladylike preference, rather than aversion, for a really good cigar, and yours is a good one; but it is so far a convenient predilection nowadays, for while I patiently bear the infliction of smoking, poor dear Ellen almost faints if there is tobacco within half a mile of her."

Lord Warneford smiled, but a little sadly. There was a time, he remembered well, when Ellen Egerton was as indifferent to such trifles as Kate was, but he had the discretion not to say so, and instead he congratulated her on her taste for early rising. Nothing, he was convinced, was more conducive to health and beauty.

"Yes," said Kate, gaily, "We all know that:—

'Give me back, give me back the wild freshness of morning;
Her smiles and her tears are worth evening's best light.'

"Still a quoter, Kate? I remember you used to be so when you were a little thing, not so tall as Bevis."

"Yes; to my fragmentative mind there is something pleasant in the strange confusion, yet blending, of images which are conjured up, when by a chance word the electric chord of memory is touched, and a quotation rings out as different from the original subject as the minor seventh is from the tonic, and yet with a kind of concatenation too, which is at once agreeable and provoking."

"Humph!" said the "honest man," a little puzzled by this confusion of images. "I am grown rusty about such quips and cranks of fancy, fairy; you must waken me up a little."

"Nay, I don't think you require it. You look far more wide-awake than you used to do nine years ago. Heigho! what an old woman that makes of me! Nine years since you were the grave, sober, good-natured Captain Hazlewood, and I a merry, laughing tomboy; and now you are my Lord Warneford, the dignified, courteous, amusing host,—the useful, great man of the neighbourhood; while little Kate is a sober, grave woman. *Sic transit gloria mundi*, or rather the converse; but as I cannot Latinize that, you must."

"Kate, Kate ! what a busy little tongue you have !"

" 'The busy tongue, through all the little state,
Dispenses doubt, suspicion, and debate.'"

Nay, Lord Warneford, I don't think I do that," said the incorrigible girl, with a hearty laugh. "Really my tongue does very little mischief. At all events, not half so much as it might. Do you know, honest man, it sometimes makes me shudder to think how much evil even an insignificant girl, such as I, could do ; and apparently without intention. A word here or there, an ill-natured remark repeated, an unjust accusation confirmed. Good Heavens ! how fervently may we pray not to be led into temptation ! How easy it is to be wicked—how very difficult to be good. Do you not think so ?" and the black eyes looked up at him with an eager questioning glance. "Do you not feel, as I do, that often, with the most earnest desire to do right, we are drawn into wrong ? Little wrong, perhaps, but enough to make ourselves unhappy, and to give those around us a mighty bad opinion of us."

"I dare say it may be so, Kate ; but you know I am not so impulsive as you are. Besides, if I should be at all inclined to evil, I have the advantage of my dear wife's clear judgment and most excellent good sense to fall back upon. Believe me, fairy, it is a great matter to make a good choice in marriage : two heads are far better than one."

Kate was tempted to laugh at this reply, but had presence of mind to say very gravely, and with apparent simplicity, "Do you really think, Lord Warneford, that Judith's clear judgment and excellent sense could help *me* to be good ?"

At first he was deceived by her quiet manner of asking the question, but a little saucy turn of her head enlightened him, and he said,—

"Ah ! Kate, you are a clever little tricky spirit. You want to worm the truth out of me ; you want to know what my wife said of your long flirtation with my cousin Guy Travers last night, but I shan't tell you."

"You have told me," laughed Kate. "I had suspected she thought I was flirting, when indeed, indeed I was not. On the contrary, I was giving him no end of good advice—

was as moral as any Mrs. Lovechild in a good story-book, and only listened to his fox-hunting stories because—because I could not help it.”

“Well, Kate, I told Judith I thought so. Guy talks as fast as you do, and it did not strike me that you were at all sorry to get to the end of his story.”

“On the contrary, I was charmed to exchange empty talk for solid pudding,” said Kate gaily; “but now, Lord Warneford, I shall tell *you* the whole truth. I know I can trust you, and I know that, though now ‘my lord,’ you are still for me the ‘honest man’ who helped me out of many a childish scrape, and would willingly do so again. I am of a merry, lively disposition; I like to talk and to be talked to far better than to sit at my crochet-work, as poor good Miss Graham does; but that does not make me a flirt, does it?”

“Well, fairy, I scarce know what a flirt is. A coquette I do know, and detest. She is a creature who, being devoid of a heart herself, loves to play with and torture that of others; but a flirt is a dear little, merry soul who has no evil intentions beyond a little selfishness in determining to amuse herself at any cost. At least, I suppose it amuses her to attract as great a crowd of admirers round her as she can, and to be not very scrupulous as to the means of doing so.”

Kate blushed. “I hope, then, I am not a flirt,” she said with feeling. “I hope I am scrupulous as to the means of attracting attention. At all events, I do not intentionally amuse myself at the expense of others, although perhaps I have been a little more self-engrossed hitherto than I ought to have been. But, as Lady Wortley Montague wrote, ‘I came young into the hurry of the world, and a great innocence and undesigning gaiety may have been construed as coquetry and a desire of being followed, though never meant by me.’”

“I thoroughly believe you, my child,” he said kindly, “and were I Harry, I would make an end of all this shillyshallying, and in spite of prudence, and money, and good advice, marry off-hand. Believe me, it is far the best plan.”

Kate laughed heartily at the energy with which he uttered this decision; but said slyly, “There are always two to the making of a bargain, Lord Warneford.”

He laughed too, but said, "Take care how you make that joke with Judith or her mother. I have a very great respect for both, but sometimes they are just the very least thing in the world touchy on some points. You are not angry with me, fairy, for my frankness?"

"Oh, no, no!" she replied eagerly; "you have been a true friend to me ever since you saved me from breaking my neck when my little wild Welsh pony flung me over the park paling. Many a kind word of advice did you give me in those days—advice which no one else thought it worth while to bestow on me—and I assure you it fell on no ungrateful soil."

"Thank you, Kate! Then let's swear an alliance, offensive and defensive, against all and sundry. Come at once to me whenever you are in want of counsel or help, and I'll give you the best I have, and between us we shall weather the storm bravely. From this moment you have free access to my sanctum, and may come to me there whenever you please."

"And how shall I repay such fatherly kindness?" and as she clasped his large hand in her little ones, the tears were in her eyes, for Lord Warneford's manner was far more parental to her than her own father's.

"By letting me see a merry face and hear a gay laugh and song. Nay, you can do more. You can try to set our shy friend, Ethelbert de l'Orme, at ease with himself and with the world. He is the best and best-informed fellow I know, but as shy as a frightened bird; and my wife and I have set our hearts—— However, I must not tell you *all* our secrets yet; only if you can get De l'Orme to show himself as he really is to yourself and—and your sister, you will do us all a favour. It is not many girls to whom I would intrust such a commission; it might be dangerous to most to find what a treasure lies in that rude casket, but not to you, my Kate of Kates."

Kate smiled. Again had Lord Warneford betrayed Judith's secret. They wished Ethelbert de l'Orme to admire Ellen. That was plain enough. Kate feared it would not do; but perhaps, if her sister were really interested in drawing him out of his shell——

Her half-formed thoughts were interrupted by the approach

of Guy Travers and Mr. Wilmington. Guy came up with outstretched hand to bid Miss Egerton good morning, and hope she had recovered from last night's fatigues. Mr. Wilmington contrived to express his admiration of her picturesque costume and of the exquisite arrangement of the scarlet drapery round her head and shoulders.

Kate received the fine speeches of the one and the boyish familiarity of the other with a quiet dignity which charmed Lord Warneford, who, as with a sweeping bow she tripped away to prepare for breakfast, whispered to her,—

"That is the way to treat them, fairy. Let them see that wholesale flattery won't do for you;" and with this encouragement in the ways of well-doing she sprang lightly up the turret stairs.

The month of probation passed more quickly than Kate expected, and long before it expired she had contrived to make herself a general favourite. Messrs. Wilmington and Travers were wild in their admiration of her. She was so bright, so clever, so spirited and good-natured, yet withal managed to keep them at such a distance, that they respected as much as they adored the little sparkling, joyous fairy. Lord Warneford made her his constant companion.

Mrs. Dashwood petted her as if she were already her own child. Even the gruff Scotch gardener was mollified by her bright eyes and cheery voice, and allowed her the run of the greenhouses, and permission to pluck what flowers she chose—a liberty scarcely accorded to Lady Warneford; while Lady Warneford herself had so far overcome her prejudices as to write to her brother privately, that now that she really knew what Kate was, she believed that, fortune or no fortune, he could not do a wiser thing than to make her his wife as soon as possible.

And Ethelbert de l'Orme, how did Kate get on with him! Most admirably, for she not only contrived to set him quite at ease with herself, but dexterously managed to enlist Ellen's compassionate feelings in his favour.

Matters were in this state, when one afternoon, towards the end of November, Lord Warneford and Kate set off on a ride to a village some ten miles distant. They had been accidentally prevented from setting off as early in the morning as they had intended, and they warned Ellen that they

might be late in returning, therefore she must not be uneasy if they were not home before the sun went down. Ellen laughingly said she would have no fear. Lord Warneford, she knew, was careful. But when a heavy snow-storm came on, and twilight faded into darkness, she had difficulty in persuading herself that all was well. Judith reassured her as well as she could, but even she seemed relieved when about seven in the evening horses' feet were heard on the gravel sweep before the house.

"Ah, there they are at last! I hear horses' feet."

It was the postboy with a letter. "A letter from Harry," Judith exclaimed, breaking the seal eagerly. "He comes to-morrow, mother! No, to-night! I wish Kate were returned!"

Hardly had the words passed her lips, when again the sound of horses' feet was heard, but this time accompanied by the roll of wheels. Ellen grew very pale. Her fertile fancy suggested an accident, but she made no remark. The complete shatter her whole nervous system had sustained in her youth, made her keenly sensitive to fear, though she had learned to control its expression.

"Yes," said the less excitable Lady Warneford, "I was right. The Howards have arrived, and have sent them home in the carriage," and she ran down stairs to meet them and tell them of Harry's expected arrival; but it was Harry himself, not Lord Warneford and Kate, whom she met in the hall.

"Where is Kate?" was his first question; and he no sooner received an answer, than in spite of every argument his mother and sister could offer, he set off to seek them, although a heavy fall of snow had now succeeded the hail, and the night was so dark that he could not go beyond the avenue without the certainty of missing them.

"Only to the lodge," he said; "I shan't go a step farther; but I can't stay quiet in the house waiting and wondering what has become of them. I *will* go, Judith."

Judith got a little angry at his obstinacy. She could not yet reconcile herself—few elder sisters can—to the brother, so much her junior, the brother she had carried in her girlish arms when he was an infant, showing so decided a will of his own. Ellen felt that in Harry's place she would

have done as he did ; and Mrs. Dashwood folded her hands and silently prayed that all might be well with her dear ones.

The house-door had just closed on Harry's retreating figure, when that of the anteroom was opened, and Kate stood on the threshold, dripping like a sea-nymph. Mrs. Dashwood whispered to them not to mention Harry's arrival and departure. Ellen sprang forward to inquire what had detained them so long.

"Oh, the most charming adventure!" Kate exclaimed, taking off her riding-hat, and shaking back the long curls, which, saturated with the damp, hung in disordered masses over her eyes.

"Well! since you are safe," said Judith, in the cold, hard voice, that with her veiled any unusual fit of emotion, "we shall delay hearing the adventure till you change your dress;" and she walked quietly out of the room to see that her husband followed the same good advice, and to despatch a messenger in search of Harry.

"You were not thrown, Kate?" Ellen asked, as she drew her sister away to get off her riding-habit before Harry's return.

"Thrown! oh dear, no! We took shelter in an old barn for half an hour—that detained us so long; but the great incident of the day was that we nearly rode over a child. Such a beautiful child!"

"You shall describe her to me while you dress," for Kate had turned back to tell Mrs. Dashwood, who was a great child-fancier, the story.

"I shall not stay one moment, Ellen; but I must ask dear Mrs. Dashwood if she knows anything of our little beauty, for Lord Warneford admired her as much as I did. Did you not?" she asked, as he came up.

"Did I not? I never saw such a lovely little angel in my life."

"How did you return, Charles?" interrupted Lady Warneford, getting more and more provoked at Kate's talking of such a trifle when she did so wish her to dress at once.

"By the stables. But about this child; I cannot fancy who she is. We met her at Arden, close to the Priory gate."

"Many of the villagers have children," Judith replied with a laugh.

"This was no vulgar child," said Kate, indignantly. "Her voice, her air, and manner showed both birth and breeding, though her dress was common enough. We asked her where she lived, and she pointed towards the village; but as we were late we had not time to make more minute inquiries. She said her name was Emmeline."

"A fantastic name enough," Lady Warneford remarked, and then she reiterated her good advice about wet clothes, colds, &c. &c., so that Kate was obliged to go. Still, however, she continued to talk to Ellen of the child; her dark radiant eyes, her sweet smile, her clustering curls, would, as she declared, have won even Judith's child-hating heart.

"Kate, Kate, you little know what you are saying," said Ellen, more sharply than her sister had ever heard her speak before. "Judith's great sorrow should be sacred to you; it is love that makes her dread to see children, not hatred. The remembrance of her lost little ones always rises up before her when she sees them."

"Indeed, Ellen, I never guessed that this was the case," said Kate, penitently, "I shall never offend so again. Forgive my petulance, I fear it was a little bit of spite, because she seemed so indifferent about our beauty. I wish you had seen her, Ellen. She fell so directly before our horses that it was God's mercy she was not trampled to death; indeed, at first, we fancied she was seriously hurt, but when Lord Warneford lifted her from the ground she said she was only very much frightened, scarcely hurt at all, and instead of crying, as other children would have done, she smiled and thanked him so prettily for his kindness to her. And then a cottage door opened and—— But whose carpet-bag is that," she suddenly exclaimed; "has any one come?"

Before Ellen could answer, quick steps were heard behind them; Kate turned, uttered a joyful cry, and in another instant was clasped in Harry's arms.

"You silly child," said Lady Warneford, half-laughing half-crying, "why would you delay changing your wet habit?"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CONCERT.

"The great affliction of our life *does* give the tone to its whole future tenor; it becomes part of ourselves, and, come what may, so does it remain. Time may soften its influence, and render its recurrence upon the mind less frequent; but there are moments when it will be heard; there are seasons when, like the mighty stream, it breaks down all dykes and dams that worldly intercourse has raised to keep it out, and it rushes at once into its ancient channel."

LOVE'S MEMORIES.

"HAVE we any engagement for to-night, Judith?" asked Lord Warneford one afternoon, about a week after Harry's arrival; "for they have brought me this advertisement, and earnestly beg our patronage." So saying, he gave her a printed paper he held in his hand.

Everybody gathered round to see its contents. The few last days had been wretchedly wet, and even Harry and Kate began to think that a little outdoor amusement might be agreeable.

"A concert!" exclaimed Lady Warneford, unfolding the long narrow bill. "A concert at the Warneford Theatre. I did not know that such a place existed."

"It has been tenantless for years," said her husband; "but my earliest histrionic recollections are associated with it, and if you do not object, I should like well enough to see the old place again."

"Object! We shall all be delighted." And they began to pore over the announcement that Signor and Signora Rendralli, and *all* the talent of the metropolis, were to give a miscellaneous concert of vocal and instrumental music at seven o'clock that evening, in the Theatre of Warneford.

Dinner was ordered early, a summons sent to Ethelbert de l'Orme to join them, and by the appointed hour Lord Warneford's party were seated in the three principal boxes of the little theatre. Except themselves, there were but

half a dozen persons in the dress circle, and about twice the number in the pit, while the galleries were entirely empty. It was a melancholy spectacle, and in spite of their intentions of amusing themselves, they had not the heart to laugh when the curtain drew up and they saw the haggard faces and pallid cheeks of the Signor and Signora, and listened to voices that had once been fine and well-cultivated, but were now worn and exhausted. Instead of laughing, they applauded, and their kindly sympathy evidently roused the singers to use their utmost endeavours to please ; but, in spite of their best exertions, the whole performance was so mediocere that Lord Warneford, at the end of the first part, proposed that they should return home. But a difficulty came in the way of this arrangement. A sudden frost had set in ; already the roads were slippery with ice, and the steep descent towards Warneford made it impossible to risk the return thither with unroughed horses. Some delay must take place before any of the carriages could be at the ladies' service, and the gentlemen must walk. Luckily, every one was good-natured, and readily agreed to remain till the end ; it would, moreover, be more considerate to the musicians.

One only of the party regretted the delay, and that was Ellen. Within the last few days she had been rather annoyed to find that Ethelbert de l'Orme had so completely overcome his reserve as to force upon her the conviction of a growing interest towards her which she was most unwilling to encourage, and this evening he had made his attentions so pointed that she had been forced to repulse them decidedly. This gave her very great pain, for so little did she anticipate the possibility of such folly, when complying with the Warnefords' wish that she should try to overcome his natural diffidence, encourage him to exertion, and gently lead him to consider the responsibilities of life opening before him, that it had never occurred to her that he could mistake the kind of interest she felt in him. Accustomed to look upon herself as one long past the meridian of life, she forgot that to the eyes of others she appeared under a different aspect, so girlish still was her tall elastic figure, so unmarked by time her delicate oval face, with its pure placid brow, its sunny brown hair, and its intelligent, yet soft, dark grey eyes. But now she found her

mistake, and bitterly did she regret the snare into which she had so innocently fallen.

"Kate, will you change places with me?" she asked, when the fall of the curtain, after the first part, offered an opportunity of moving from her close vicinity to De l'Orme, without making the cause too marked to others.

"This instant, Ellen; just let me take one other look at that stage box, I am almost sure that is my little beauty in it, along with an old gentleman. It is, indeed. Look, Harry! Look, Ellen, is she not a darling? Ah, you are too late, they have drawn the curtain again." And when Ellen turned in the direction to which she pointed nothing was visible but the dingy red curtain, which a white and evidently gentlemanly hand was drawing between the inmates of the only private box in the theatre and the rest of the audience.

"The mystery deepens," Kate said, turning to Lady Warneford. "I am getting more puzzled and more inquisitive about the child than ever. If we could but discover who the gentleman is, the difficulty would be solved at once. He must be somebody to have a hand so white, and to wear so brilliant a diamond. Did you see how it sparkled, Harry?"

"The box," said Sir Walter Trafford, "belonged once to the Priory. Perhaps some of the servants have taken possession of it during Sir Ludovic's absence."

"The servants!" said Kate disdainfully; "it is more likely to be one of the family."

"Sir Ludovic is a widower with an unmarried son," said Sir Walter, rather haughtily, for he was a little indignant to have his suggestion so contemptuously received, "and his sister, who lives with him, has no children. Besides, they are from home."

"Effingham was to be at the Priory about this time," Lord Warneford remarked, "and had some hopes of bringing poor Neville with him. He is sadly cut up, you know, by his mother's death."

"Neither Effingham Howard nor Louis Neville would think of drawing a curtain between themselves and the *beaux yeux* of the ladies," said Sir Walter, with a sweeping bow.

"And most certainly neither of them is likely to bring

a little girl to an indifferent concert with him," added Harry, "though both do affect jewellery a little. I don't like to see sparkling stones on manly fingers; do you, Kate?" After which remark the conversation dropped.

Ellen, meanwhile, had seated herself in the corner of the box, which Kate had resigned to her, and was listening, with half-closed eyes, to the duet from "Norma" between Pollione and Adalgiza, "Vien in Roma." Even then it was hackneyed, but being particularly well sung, it was listened to with avidity, not by Ellen only, but by the others.

Sir Walter went off into reminiscences of the first time he had heard that air in fair Italian clime. Ellen's recollections went back to the time when she used to sing it with Reginald.

Why should she remember that so well to-night? She had often heard, nay, often sung the air since then. Perhaps it was Ethelbert de l'Orme's unlucky assiduities which had revived the past so painfully. Her eye chanced to fall upon him at the moment. He was seated at the back of the box, looking wretchedly ill, but enduring with a kind of forced smile the vapid chatter of a young niece of Sir Walter's, who had accompanied him to the concert, and who was delighted to find so patient a listener to her platitudes. Ellen felt grieved to see the changed aspect of his face from what it had been a few hours before, and turning away her eyes fixed them unconsciously on the private box opposite. She observed, with a kind of listless indifference, that the curtain was again partially open, and she sighed to think how long it was since she had felt the enthusiasm her sister experienced for its childish occupant. The white, gentlemanly hand, with its brilliant ring, lay on the red cushion, but for a time that alone was visible. By-and-by, however, the red curtain was more and more withdrawn, until a young eager face behind it was distinctly visible. It certainly was lovely, and though that of a child apparently not more than six or eight years of age, had such a look of thought and intelligence in the large melancholy eyes, as they fixed themselves in rapt admiration on the singers, that insensibly Ellen also became interested in watching her.

Surely those eyes were familiar to her! She felt as if she had seen them, or others like them, many a long year ago,

but where she vainly endeavoured to recall. Strangely enough it seemed to her as if the rest of the countenance did not altogether assimilate with those large liquid eyes. There was something foreign in their depth and dreamy darkness, while the other features were clearly defined and completely Saxon in character, especially the massive breadth of the forehead and its look of intellectual power; to which the firm jaw and mouth gave additional force.

As this thought occurred to Ellen, the child suddenly turned to address the unseen gentleman in the back of the box. She seemed to be urging some request upon him he was unwilling to grant, for he shook his head decidedly, even while he stooped forward to caress her. Ellen could not see his face, but that of the child showed very great eagerness, as again and again she reiterated her request, glancing the while across the theatre, as if anxious to draw his attention to Lord Warneford's box. At last the little creature, with a sudden flash of the eye and look of determination in the rosebud mouth, drew back the curtain entirely. The gentleman started forward to replace it, and one glance of that face, altered as it was, solved Ellen's difficulty. It was Reginald. His were the features she had recognized in the child, but the eyes were those of Terese. He did not see her, of that she was certain. His whole attention was engrossed by the child, on whom he turned an affectionate look of remonstrance. Ellen almost fancied she could hear the little girl's voice entreating he would look only once across the theatre, so earnestly appealing was her whole countenance. At last a consenting smile curved his lip and chased the look of sorrow from his eyes. - He gently patted her sunny curls, and gave one glance across the narrow space that divided him from Ellen. She tried to look away, but the effort was beyond her power. Their eyes met for one single instant. She knew he recognized her, but the curtain was instantly replaced, and father and child vanished from her sight. She grew very faint, and longed—oh, how she longed!—to be at home.

"The carriage is ready, Ellen; shall we go?" whispered Kate. "How pale you look, darling. This hot place has been too much for you. Harry, take care of Ellen."

It was not Harry, however, but Ethelbert de l'Orme, who

sprang forward to her assistance, who led her carefully through the narrow passages of the little theatre, and lifted her into the carriage. But she was utterly unaware that it was to his arm she clung so helplessly till he whispered,—

“Oh ! Miss Egerton, tell me this is not my doing.”

“Oh, no !” she said with difficulty ; “I assure you it is not. I——” She stopped.

“That is all I care to know,” he said quickly ; “it made me so miserable to think I had given you pain.”

Ellen was too ill to think of the possible meaning of this speech, or to imagine he had interpreted her answer to his own advantage.

The party in the carriage were tired and silent, and immediately on reaching home Ellen, pleading a wretched headache, retired to her room, and, hastily dismissing her maid, seated herself by the bright wood-fire and tried to think.

How came he to be at Warneford ? The village Sir Francis had mentioned as his residence was in a distant county. But had he not said that he was only there for a time—that he had a cure offered him by a friend ? Where was that cure ? Was there any chance of their being thrown together once more ? Must they meet as common acquaintances, or what was almost more difficult, as long-parted friends ? Ought she to tell the Warnefords that he was near them ?

These detached questions rushed through her brain with oppressive rapidity. She could not answer them ; she could not even decide how to act. The sight of that altered, but familiar face had moved her far more than she had supposed was now possible. She did not dare to analyze the impression it had made on her, it was so overpowering, so very, very sad. The expression of his face was unlike any she had ever before seen. Very calm, very gentle, and yet with such a look of constant suffering stamped upon it, that she could not think of it without unbidden tears rising to her eyes.

“God grant,” she ejaculated, “that whatever his sorrows may be, that child may be his earthly solace, and his Saviour his heavenly rock of strength.”

Hardly had the short though earnest prayer passed her

lips, when a light tap at the door announced Kate, come to see whether dear Ellen were better ; she could not go to bed in peace till she was sure that that troublesome faintness had gone off.

"Quite gone, love." And Ellen turned her tear-stained eyes from the light.

"Judith assured Mr. De l'Orme that you are rather in the habit of fainting, so that he need not alarm himself about you ; but he is so very wretched, so anxious, that I promised to come and see you before he left, and tell him how you are."

"Quite well, I assure you."

"Let me look at you. Nay, Ellen, darling, what is this ?" she said, as she knelt down by her sister's side, and put her slight arm fondly round her. "How comes it that you are weeping, and do not tell me why ?"

"It is only because I feel very weak to-night, Cara," she replied, hastily wiping her eyes. "A night's sleep will revive me."

Kate was not satisfied by this explanation. "What made you weak, Ellen ?—has anything vexed you ?" she said pertinaciously. Ellen was silent. "Mr. De l'Orme is very wretched about you," Kate again repeated. "He begged me to ask you——" She hesitated. Ellen fixed her eyes on her anxiously,—“whether what happened in the theatre to-night would have any effect on your former friendship with him."

"What happened to-night, Kate ?" said Ellen, with a painful start, for she had been so engrossed by the thought of Reginald and his child that for an instant she forgot what other event had occurred ; but suddenly remembering it, she said, hurriedly, "I cannot tell ; it depends on himself, on his own good sense and prudence."

"Then you give him no hope, Ellen ?"

"None."

"Oh, Ella, darling, I am so sorry. I like him so much, and—and—and I am so happy myself that I should like to see you so also."

"I am happy, Kate ; far happier than I deserve, than I ever expected I should be."

"But you might be happier, you might make others so. Both Judith and Lord Warneford——"

"Kate, Kate!" she interrupted in great agitation, "do not say they encouraged this foolish, this—this ill-judged preference. Oh, could my best friends know the agony, the bitter, bitter agony they inflict upon me by their well-meant endeavours, they would leave me in peace!" And, as if the whole torrent of her long-past sorrow had regained its ancient channel, her head sank on her sister's shoulder, and her slight figure shook under the passion of her grief.

Kate, who had never imagined the possibility of Ellen, the sweet, even-tempered Ellen being swayed by any other than the gentlest emotion, looked at her in blank amazement and horror.

What could be the meaning of such intense agitation? She had begun to suspect, it is true, that her sister's early life had not been altogether a happy one, but there was something so frightful in her present excitement that she could make nothing of it. So she twined her soft arms round her, laid her cool cheek on her sister's burning brow, and whispered,—

"My darling, my darling, compose yourself; do not give way so, you break my heart."

The sympathizing words soothed her. She gradually controlled her feelings, her sobs became less convulsive, and, at length, she was able to murmur a few words of gratitude and apology.

"Forgive me, Kate, for terrifying you so. I told you I was very weak to-night, and when I am so the least thing unnerves me."

"The least thing?" Kate repeated.

"I do not mean," said Ellen, correcting herself, "that what has occurred to-night is a *little* thing. To me it is one of the sorest trials that could have befallen me; but it is only one confirmation more, had I required it, that—that—I can never marry."

"I feared that was what you were going to say, Ellen. I wish it were otherwise," said Kate, who was almost as much puzzled by her explanation, if explanation it were, as by her agitation.

"I see you do not understand me, Kate," said Ellen, with a deep sigh, "therefore I shall give you some idea of the secret of my life ; it will show you why it is that the very idea of marriage makes me shudder." As she said this, she unclasped a braid of snow white hair, which, Kate had remarked, she always wore on the third finger of her left hand, and showed her that a wedding ring was concealed beneath it. "This ring was placed here many years ago by one I loved very dearly. It is no longer the emblem I once considered it, but I cannot consent to change it for another. This may be weakness, Kate, but it is one which I firmly believe will outlast my life."

"But, Ellen, this ring, what does it signify ?" asked Kate, more and more puzzled.

"Signify ? My child, do you not understand me ? Well, it is better not. It is enough for you to know that my fate in life is fixed ; I do not say it is a happy one, but, thank God, it is bearable ; nay, more, I have sometimes really felt grateful for the suffering I have endured. Believe me, dear Kate, there are some hearts which nothing but suffering can bring close to God, while others—yours, I humbly trust—are drawn to Him by happiness and prosperity." She paused, and carefully reclasped the braid of hair round her finger ; then, turning again to her sister, whose tear-filled eyes were watching her eagerly, she added, "And now, my dear love, you will help me to avoid any such misery as poor Mr. De l'Orme has inflicted on me. You will now believe me in earnest when I repeat that nothing shall ever tempt me to change my present resolution."

"I will—I do ; and, believe me, Ellen, I shall never forget this proof of your confidence, and shall never betray it." She rose up, hastily pressed a fond kiss on her cheek, and left the room.

The next day Ellen was told that Ethelbert de l'Orme had gone abroad.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE VICAR OF ARDEN.

"To man
Are now address'd the sacred words ;
Instruction, admonition, comfort, peace
Flow from his tongue. O Chief, let comfort flow,
It is most needed in this vale of tears."

GRAHAM'S SABBATH.

THE next day was one of heavy snow, and the next and the next. But when Sunday came, it was a bright, clear frost, under whose influence Nature's winding-sheet lay crisp and white, and icicles hung pendant from every tree and shrub, and sparkled in the sunshine like the jewelled fruit of Aladdin's garden.

"A beautiful morning!" exclaimed Lord Warneford, chafing his cold blue hands as he entered the breakfast-room from the garden, where, as usual, he had been luxuriating in his first cigar. "We must make up our minds, however, to walk to church; no horse could travel these slippery roads."

"Delightful!" ejaculated the younger members of the party, who infinitely preferred walking together, to being boxed up in the huge family omnibus, "and the farther we have to walk the better."

"Suppose we go to Montreville church," suggested Judith. "I have long wished to hear the new rector. They say he is an excellent preacher, but you, Charles, are so particular in always going to Warneford."

"Am I not right, love? The old vicar would be miserable if we deserted the parish church. And if Dr. Linford does not give us brilliant discourses, he is at least orthodox."

"Oh yes, I am very fond of the old vicar. I would not hurt his feelings on any account, and I do like Warneford church very much: still I think to-day we might go to Montreville."

"Very well. So be it. Only," turning to Mrs. Dashwood, "I fear neither you nor Miss Egerton can accompany us."

"How far is it to Montreville?" Ellen asked eagerly, for the idea flashed across her mind that the new rector might possibly be Reginald. It was improbable; still as it was not strictly impossible, she should like to take the chance. It would be so great a blessing to her to realize by sight and hearing that he filled that holy office.

"Two miles and a half, I am certain. You must not attempt to go so far."

"Oh no, I cannot," but she looked so bitterly disappointed, that Mrs. Dashwood suggested that she and Ellen might contrive to go to the Priory chapel; it was but half a mile to Arden by the short cut through the park. Both of them could make out that distance.

Ellen smiled her gratitude. It was not what she had wished, still she felt the kindness that prompted the proposal, and she accepted it without hesitation.

"We might all go to Arden," Lord Warneford suggested.

"But the day is so delicious for a long walk," reiterated Kate.

"Well, then let us go to Montreville; but if so, we must get ready directly."

Ellen's eyes followed them longingly down the avenue. It was many a long day since she had been able to walk at that brisk pace, many since she had tasted the intense delight of that active exercise, which stirs the life-blood at the heart, raises the spirits, brightens the eyes, gives elasticity to the whole vital powers, which, in a word, makes the mere act of living a pure enjoyment. What invention of man's can fill its place? what means of locomotion be found to do all this? The easy roll of the most luxurious carriage, drawn by the best trained horses, what is it to the fleet foot of youth, springing from height to hollow, now pausing on the extreme point of some airy eminence to gaze afar on the wide expansive beauties of nature, now bounding across the fragrant turf with a step so light as scarcely to bow down the head of the most delicate wildflower! Of all the regrets which overshadow the heart of the invalid or the aged, is the thought

that this luxurious sensation of the *joyaunce* of life once gone, seldom comes back again.

Ellen turned from the window with a sigh.

"My love," said Mrs. Dashwood, tenderly, "you must not suppose that because your strength has decreased in this first trying winter at home, it is gone entirely. With the genial breath of spring it will return."

Ellen smiled very sadly. "No," she said, mournfully, "'the wild swan youth hath flown' away from me for ever. Neither youth nor strength can ever come again in this world, so it is better not to indulge any false anticipations. My course is run."

"My child, it pains me to hear you speak in such a depressed tone. You have only lately passed the portals of life, and yet you say your race is run, your appointed work on earth completed! It is not wise, dear Ellen, neither is it Christian thus to repine at God's dealings with you."

"I did not mean to repine," she answered, meekly; "but sometimes when I feel weak and useless I long so to beat rest."

"Believe me, Ellen, that you would be so were it best either for yourself or others. But if you are permitted still to remain here below, you may be certain that God has some work for you to perform, even in this world, if you do not resolutely close your eyes and heart against it. It is not right, love, to shut yourself up in your own feelings, to give way to despondency, to imagine that because you have less physical strength than your neighbours, you are therefore entitled to look gloomily on life. But I must reserve the end of my lecture for another time," she said hastily, as the clock struck the half-hour after ten. "It is almost time for us to start. I like to walk slowly."

Ellen was hurt by the tone of Mrs. Dashwood's remonstrance. It was the first time for very long that she had been accused of despondency, or of taking too gloomy views of life, and forgetting how natural it was that Mrs. Dashwood should see only the surface of her fate, forgetting more especially that the last few anxious days had made her less cheerful than usual, she felt tempted to believe her old friend unjust, and to think—"Did she know all, she would judge me less harshly!"

But merely for her this idea did not long continue. A short consideration of what Mrs. Dashwood had said led her to more serious reflection ; a slight examination of her own heart forced upon her the conviction that she had given way to despondency more from the keen disappointment of being unable to go to Montreville than from any real increase of lassitude or weakness, and also to see that had her wish been gratified it might have brought her more pain than pleasure.

Hitherto she had been saved the misery of betraying the secret of her life to others, and yet would have exposed herself wilfully to the very danger she had so long escaped ; for how could she tell what effect it might have produced on her to see him in so altered a position ? what words might have escaped her, what awkward inquiries she might have drawn down upon herself ! At all events, she must have been forced to speak with apparent indifference of that change in him which was the greatest joy of her life, the one bright spot in her troubled existence.

These thoughts were not without their effect, and when, a few instants later, she rejoined her old friend, Mrs. Dashwood, struck by the renewed serenity of her countenance, took her hand gently in both of hers and whispered, "My dear child, the cloud is already past ; you believe and hope."

Ellen smiled, a little faintly : "I try to do so ;" and added almost in a whisper, "Lord, I believe—help Thou mine unbelief."

No more was said, for each understood the other, and felt that silence, after the discussion of such a theme was more eloquent than words ; and nothing, save a passing remark on the beauty of the winter scene, was exchanged between them till they came within sight of Arden.

The short cut thither was by a nicely gravelled path leading across the American garden to a sheltered lane whose high holly hedges made it so impervious to summer sun or winter snow, that even to-day they could walk along it in security and comfort.

And when they reached it, Ellen was surprised to see what a pretty little place it was, nestling in a sheltered valley by the side of a gurgling stream, with the village green dotted over with fine old trees, and the Priory, now the resi-

dence of the Howards, standing, as almost all the ecclesiastical buildings of the olden time did, in the most beautiful and most commanding position possible. The little church, which had formerly been the chapel of the Priory, was considered a gem of architecture, and everything about it, the dwelling-house and the village, denoted the attention and care of a tasteful and rich proprietor.

Ellen stood for a moment on the rising ground, looking down on the sweet Sabbath winter scene, and thinking that she should like to worship God in so lovely a spot, and in one consecrated for many ages to His service. Mrs. Dashwood's eye was differently occupied.

"I have not been here for many months," she said, "and I am greatly struck by the changes they have lately made, especially in the parsonage. Do you see that little building whose chimneys just rise above the trees? When I was here last, nothing but a pretty bright garden divided it from the road. Look at it now."

Ellen did look, and she, too, was struck by a certain peculiarity about the house which seemed most incongruous with its position and intended use. It was a dwelling which ought to have had its lawn interspersed with flower-beds, its walls covered with roses. But instead of this it was surrounded by defences suited to a beleaguered city. From the eminence on which they stood they saw that behind the high holly-hedge which divided it from the road a solid palisade was erected, some six or eight feet high, which not only shut out all view of the road, but also rose on either side the broad gravel walk which led to the house. This walk, apparently the only access to the parsonage, was closed at the end nearest the house by a gate, whose iron stanchions were filled up by wooden planks that at once acted as a defence from intrusion and a screen from curious eyes. All the windows in the direction of the village were bricked up, save the one immediately adjoining the door. In short, there was a look of desolation and yet of strength about the building which grated against one's preconceived idea of the peace and tranquillity of a clergyman's home.

"I cannot make it out," Mrs. Dashwood said, after a long contemplation of it. "Everything looks new and carefully

attended to, but the whole place gives one more the impression of a castle prepared against attack, or of the dwelling-place of the sleeping beauty than of a Christian minister. I must ask Charles what fancy has seized the clergyman. I used to hear him spoken of as a very worthy man."

As she said this she carefully descended the rough, slippery path towards the church, for the bell was now ringing, and the villagers were slowly wending their way towards the house of prayer. When they reached the level road, Ellen perceived that the inner defences of walls and iron gates, which had attracted their attention from the height on which they stood, were here invisible from the formation of the ground. From the road she only saw the high holly hedge and the long, thin chimneys rising between the more distant trees.

When they had almost reached the parsonage-gate, a gentleman passed out of it, closed it carefully behind him, and walked swiftly forward in the direction of the church. His clerical dress and the salutations of the villagers showed him to be the clergyman, but he passed too quickly for either Mrs. Dashwood or Ellen to catch even a glimpse of his countenance.

"I should have liked to see his face," Mrs. Dashwood said. "I confess my curiosity is a little excited by the strangeness of having such a house so carefully secured from intrusion."

Ellen was silent. She was trying to recall her wandering thoughts and bring them into harmony with the religious duties in which she was about to join. For her *this* clergyman had less interest than the new rector at Montreville.

The last chime of the bell ceased as they entered the church, and were conducted to a large square pew at one side of the pulpit. As they walked up the aisle, Ellen was struck by the extreme beauty of the building, the exquisite proportions of its slender pillars, and the delicate tracery of its stone-shafted windows. Well-versed in continental church architecture, she had seldom seen anything abroad more perfect in its peculiar kind than this. The only drawback was the pews, which interrupted the effect of the rows of pillars, and in some places even interfered with the beautiful painted

windows. All else was perfect ; one of the few really well-preserved churches, or rather chapels, in a district which had suffered much from the iconoclasts of the Reformation.

The pew into which they were shown was, apparently, the clergyman's, but the only persons in it were a woman and child—the woman, a hard-featured, but intelligent-looking person, was evidently an upper servant of the better class ; while the child was so immersed in her private devotions that she never raised her head from the prayer-book on which her eyes rested, or even seemed to observe the strangers' entrance. "The clergyman's daughter, probably," thought Ellen, as she too knelt down and offered her silent prayer that she might profit by the service in which she was about to join, and then she seated herself in a corner which commanded the beautiful east window of the church ; and as she traced out the allegorical meaning of its painted window, as her eyes insensibly followed the mazy windings of the rich moulding of the ceiling, and her ear listened to a sweet, though not powerful organ, whose music floated through the little building, she confessed that there are times when sounds and sights of beauty have the power to soothe the troubled heart, and bring it into more perfect consonance with high and holy things.

The ivy which circled round the windows shed a dim religious light through the little edifice, but one or two bright rays shot athwart the gloom, lighting up the minute carving of the oak screen which divided the chancel from the body of the church, and falling full on the reading-desk, in which the officiating clergyman now sat, with the book of prayer open before him. He was, apparently, a man beyond middle life, or rather declining into the vale of years, for though his hand shaded his face from a level ray of sunlight that fell full upon him, his dark hair was plentifully sprinkled with white, and his lofty form was bowed either by the weight of years or sorrow.

The organ ceased ; the priest rose and began the service with those touching words of the prodigal, "I will arise and go unto my father." Ellen started—the voice that pronounced them was Reginald's !

Yet she had repined because it was beyond her strength to go to Montreville !

She looked towards the child—how was it that she had not sooner imagined this possibility ? how was it that seeing her had not warned her of the truth ? But these thoughts were quickly swallowed up in the all-prevailing one of thankfulness that their “ Father in Heaven ” had permitted them to be brought together under such circumstances.

The service proceeded, and seldom has more justice been done to the exquisite beauty and simplicity of our church ritual than by Reginald. The rich full voice, the deep, heartfelt sense of the prayers for mercy through Jesus Christ—the expression of hope and confidence in His great salvation, so simply, yet so powerfully conveyed by the mode in which the sacred words were spoken, was such as to tell powerfully on every heart, more especially on hers, who listened for the first time to such words from his lips. It was the third Sunday in Advent, the 12th day of December, and the lessons and psalms of the day seemed to her most touchingly appropriate to the state of her feelings on the occasion, expressing in such grand words her joy and gratitude to Him who had done such great things for both of them.

How trifling were her sufferings, how light the trials she had undergone compared with this intense, this holy joy ! What were years of sorrow compared to this happiness ? Yet the sorrow she had brought on herself, the happiness was the gift of God's grace.

The morning service was over, the preacher was in the pulpit. Ellen had heard much of his power of attracting and holding fast the attention of his auditors, but she had little imagined the effect his preaching would produce upon herself. The words of the text were taken from the last verse of the last chapter of the first epistle of St. John—“ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Had he read her heart through and through ? How else could he comprehend so thoroughly all she had thought, felt, and suffered in the terrible struggle between life and death—spiritual as well as physical—which had been hers after they had parted on that dreadful day ? She knew

not what he said, it seemed to her as if it were the utterance of her own heart, not his words, that pictured the desolation of him who, fixing all his hopes on an earthly idol, finds it lying broken at his feet, and knows not where to seek comfort, until the dayspring from on high steals gently into his soul, and sheds the peace and hope, and strength which no earthly light can give, no earthly aid afford.

His was not the high-flown rhetoric of a so-called "popular preacher,"—he used no flowery language, no rounded periods, no lofty imagery. He was preaching to the poor and ignorant, and he knew that to them true eloquence consists in plain practical doctrine, clothed in the simplest language ; but the earnestness of his manner, the pathos of his voice, the power he had of persuading as a friend rather than dictating as a teacher, seemed to touch the humble audience. Not a sound broke the attentive silence save the rich full voice of the preacher, to which all gave ear as to the voice of a loving father, whom they desired alike to honour and obey.

Ellen glanced at Evelyn. Her little head was thrown back, her small hands clasped, her attitude betokening the most earnest attention, combined with childish innocence and beauty, while her large melting eyes were fixed on her father as if drinking in every word he uttered, with equal love, pride, and veneration.

The blessing was pronounced. The congregation rose to depart. Ellen lingered a moment in the porch to thank the child for admitting them into their pew, and to endeavour to begin an acquaintance she longed to prosecute. The little girl received her thanks with a grace and self-possession quite wonderful in one so young, saying that papa's pew was always open to strangers, and that if the ladies were in the neighbourhood, she hoped they would come again. And as she spoke, she looked up in Ellen's face with eyes so like her mother's that the tears started into hers, and she was on the point of making some inquiries regarding her, when Evelyn suddenly exclaimed,—

"Papa is waiting for me !" and with a little bow she darted away, and the servant, with a low curtsy, hurried after her.

Ellen turned away disappointed. She had lost perhaps her only opportunity of inquiring about Terese. And yet, why should it be so? If Lord Warneford were made aware how near his old friend was to him he would seek him out, and then——

"Ellen," said Mrs. Dashwood, interrupting her reflections, "that was a very beautiful sermon; I must go and hear him again, and persuade Judith to accompany me. Is it not odd that the clergyman's face and voice both seem familiar to me, and yet I cannot recollect to have heard him preach before? I am quite certain that he was not here last summer."

Ellen hesitated how to answer her. At last she resolved to be frank, and said quietly, "I am not surprised that Mr. Stanhope's face is familiar to you. He used to be in Lord Warneford's regiment."

"You do not mean that that is Reginald Stanhope?" she exclaimed in amazement. "I never even knew he had taken orders. Tell me all about it, dear."

"All I know is from Sir Francis Vere. He told me that our old friend has been for some years a clergyman, that he had hurt his health by over-exertion as a curate in Manchester, and that he had lately been presented to a country parish. But I was as much surprised as you were to find him here."

"Charles will be delighted to welcome his old friend," Mrs. Dashwood said; but further conversation was interrupted by two figures springing hastily down the steep knoll towards them, saying as they did so,—

"We thought we should be in time to walk part of the way home with you," and Kate added, "It is as well we came, for you look, Ellen, as if you were thoroughly exhausted. Harry, do take care of Ella; I am quite strong enough for dear Mrs. Dashwood."

Kate's rapture on learning that her "beauty" was the child of an old friend, exceeded all bounds. "I remember Reginald Stanhope quite well," she said, "and have a faint remembrance of his wife—a little spirit-like creature, with immense black eyes—who sang beautifully. I wonder whether Emmeline can sing."

"Evelyn," Ellen said quietly. "She was called after her grandmother; *my* dear mother's intimate friend."

"Oh, then you have not lost sight of Captain Stanhope, as we have done, Ellen?"

"I have not heard of him, save accidentally, since my grandmother's death," she answered, growing very pale; "but I understood he had gone into the Church, and asked Judith to find out for me. She failed in doing so. Sir Francis Vere was more successful. You may remember, Kate, that the night poor Adelaide Delancy left home, I told you I had heard some good news from him?"

"Yes, I remember your saying so; but it never occurred to me that I could take any interest in it, for you never told me what it was."

"I should have done so had I fancied you could recollect him."

"Recollect him, Ellen; why I was between nine and ten years old then, and Harry and I, like little fools as we were, fancied that Reginald and you liked each other as Judith and Lord Warneford did, and were most indignant when we heard he had married in Ireland. So you see, Ellen, how well I remember."

Ellen wished she had remembered less correctly, but she made no rejoinder save this: "Yes, Cara, we are often misled by appearances, especially when we are young."

Kate laughed at what she called Ellen's trite morality, and then left her to go and tell Lord Warneford all about it, and persuade him to call directly on Reginald Stanhope. He required no great urging, and early next morning set off. But he returned only half successful. He had seen him, indeed, but he had absolutely declined visiting at Warneford. His health, he said, required him to avoid all excitement, and his time was fully engaged by making acquaintance with his new people. Mrs. Stanhope's health, too, must excuse her from either making or receiving visits. She had for many years been entirely an invalid.

"And the child?" said Kate, eagerly.

"I did not forget her, fairy. His voice quite softened when he spoke of her. I told him of our first meeting with her, and of that glimpse we had of her at the concert—that

we had recognized her, but not him. He seemed touched by our interest in her, and promised to send her to see us some time, perhaps to-morrow."

"Ah! that is right. Shall you not be glad to make acquaintance with her, Ellen?"

Glad! the word was nothing in comparison with Ellen's eagerness to press to her heart the child associated with the one bright passing gleam of her life's happiness! And when she came—when, with a child's curious intuition as to those who love it best, Evelyn soon showed that she had rather sit on a footstool by Ellen's side, and resting her fair cheek on her knee, look up in her face to hear more stories of "dear papa when he was a boy," than join Kate in merry games of play, or listen to Lord Warneford's prettiest tales of genii or fairy, her heart beat fast, and she thanked Heaven for this new blessing.

The child's love of her father was the most beautiful thing in her sweet character. Every thought in her mind seemed to have reference to him; everything she knew, she had learned from papa; all that was good or beautiful, she compared to him. She spoke of him perpetually, and from her childish histories it was easy to see that he was as unlike the Reginald Stanhope of Heddlesham as possible. To her mother Evelyn never alluded unless when distinctly questioned, and even then, she only looked melancholy, and said she was very ill, far too ill to see anybody, almost to see her just now.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ARDEN PRIORY.

"And those high hopes, whose guiding star
Shines from eternal worlds afar,
Have with that light illumed his eye
Whose fount is immortality."

HEMANS.

KATE, escorted by Mrs. Dashwood and Harry, returned to spend the Christmas at home. Ellen, after repeated persuasions, was induced to remain a few weeks longer at Warneford, and one of her great inducements to do so was to see a little more of Evelyn Stanhope. The attachment between them had increased rapidly of late; indeed, they had been little apart, and the child was becoming gradually more communicative about her home life. Still it was a puzzle to Ellen what was Terese's illness. Evelyn spoke of her mother as walking much in the garden, being very fond of flowers, and very, very fond of music. She wished so dear mamma could hear "aunt Ellen," as she began fondly to call her new friend, "sing and play on the harp,—she did so like the harp."

"I should be very glad to sing or play to your mamma, Evelyn," Ellen said a little timidly, "if you think she would like it."

"May I ask papa if you may? I am sure you would be so fond of mamma. I am so very fond of her. She is so pretty: not like you, aunt Ellen; but with such beautiful eyes, and long, long curls,—curls down to her feet,—and little hands, less than mine. Oh, mamma is so pretty!"

"Yes, dear, I know; she is very pretty."

"Do you know mamma? Shall I tell papa you do, and that you would like to see her some day when she is good?"

The words in which the question was couched startled Ellen. "Some day when she is good." What could the child mean? But she said,—

"Yes, dear, you may. Tell your papa that his old friend Ellen Egerton would like to see mamma, if it would be good for her."

"Yes, I understand," said Evelyn, with a curious kind of intelligence in her young face, "and I think papa will let you come. He says you are almost an angel; so I am sure he will let you see mamma, for you know angels are not like people, and they may be trusted."

Ellen felt more and more surprised by this remark; but delicacy towards Reginald prevented her from pressing into the child's confidence, though she felt that she might easily have learned from her all that she craved to know.

When they next met, Evelyn told her, with a very sorrowful face, that mamma was too ill to see dear aunt Ellen just now; perhaps some day she would be better, and then papa said he knew she would like to see her very much. Papa was very much obliged to aunt Ellen for wishing to see mamma; and then the child was seized with an unusual fit of silence, and it was not till Ellen had sung all her favourite songs to her that she at all regained her spirits. There certainly was something very peculiar about little Evelyn, something precocious and womanly, that made one anxious about her, until a trait of undeniable childishness induced the belief that circumstances, more than any peculiarity of disposition, had given her the strained, old-fashioned expression which it pains one to see on a child's face.

The only person of whom she spoke much, except her father, was Mr. Howard. He was a very good friend of hers, she said, and often took her to the Priory, to play in the long corridors, when it was too cold to go to the garden. Mr. Howard was so fond of papa—that was the reason she liked him so much—and papa looked much better when Mr. Howard came to talk with him. They sometimes went to the cottages together. Did aunt Ellen know Mr. Howard?

Ellen had only seen him once or twice, for though he had been for some weeks at the Priory, and had frequently called at Warneford, his visits had chanced to be when she was not present. The child's allusion to his being a friend of her

father made her wish that she had seen more of him; and the next time he dined at Warneford, and she found herself seated next him, she turned the conversation on Mr. Stanhope—how strange it seemed to call him by that formal name—and asked many questions regarding him.

Mr. Howard's answers were guarded. He had known him, he said, ever since they were fellow-students at Oxford, and though for some years they had nearly fallen out of acquaintance, they had, latterly, renewed it, and were now fast friends. There were few men he esteemed as he did Reginald Stanhope.

"My acquaintance with him preccedes yours by many years," Ellen said; "we were almost brought up together as children, but have not met since he left the army."

"Ah, poor fellow, he is a changed man since then. He never was exactly what one calls wicked, or even wild, but a clergyman's life was the last one would have expected to suit a man of his brilliant talents. He might have made his name famous in any other profession, but he chose wisely. It was the only one in which such as he could find peace."

"Then he has done so—he is happy?" asked Ellen, and then she blushed, for the eagerness of her inquiry had evidently attracted her companion's attention.

"In his circumstances no man can be called happy," he said, very gravely. "Indeed, were this life all, he might—as, indeed, most men in his place would do even now—call it a miserable one. But it is one of Stanhope's best gifts that he can discern brightness where others see only gloom, mercy where they see only wrath."

"I remember," Ellen said, "that on one occasion, after he had escaped a great peril, a friend told him that a life so graciously preserved was evidently intended for some good purpose. He believes that now?"

"He does, indeed. I have often heard him allude to that remark. He was, I believe, the only soul on board who was saved from the lost ship?"

"Yes. The wreck occurred on the coast near my Welsh home."

"Indeed!" and again he glanced at her rather curiously, but added immediately, "It has often occurred to me that

those few words may, possibly, have been one means of leading him to become a Christian minister."

Ellen bowed. "One means, I have no doubt," she said; but she felt that it was only one of many.

"Is it long since you saw Mrs. Stanhope?" Mr. Howard asked abruptly, after a short silence.

"Nearly ten years. Before Captain Stanhope went to India."

"Ah! I thought you might have met since."

"No. Evelyn tells me she is very ill."

"Very. Hopelessly so, I fear." And, as if resolved not to be further questioned, he rose and crossed the room to speak to Lady Warneford. As he bade Ellen good-night, however, he said, "My father and aunt come to the Priory to-morrow. Lady Warneford has kindly promised to waive ceremony and dine with us on Thursday. Will you come also? My aunt is a very old lady, unable for the fatigue of morning visits, but you will excuse that, and come."

"I will, very readily," she answered.

"And I shall try to persuade Mr. Stanhope to join us. I know you would like to see your old friend again, and ours is the only house he ever visits."

Lord Warneford was charmed that Miss Egerton should see the stately old house, and its more stately master, before leaving the neighbourhood; and Ellen listened with due sympathy to the accounts he gave her of the splendid corridors, the magnificent halls, of Arden Priory, its carved wainscoats, its massive furniture; but her thoughts were more occupied by the chance of seeing Reginald, than of all the glories of eld.

The Priory was indeed a fine old place, as perfect, in its way, as the little church was in one very different; and what was more, Sir Ludovic Howard was the very master for such a home, so noble was his presence, so Grandisonian his dignified courtesy. Everything was in keeping: the retinues of servants—the great hall hung with trophies of the chase—the deep embrasured windows, with their rich-coloured velvet curtains—the endless suites of rooms—the fretted ceilings—the furniture of carved oak, black with age—the galleries of family portraits—all combined to throw

into insignificance the puny efforts of our utilitarian days. But Ellen's attention could not be entirely engrossed even by such things as these, when the question was still a doubtful one whether Reginald would consent to meet her at the Priory.

Her first glance round the assembled guests had failed to distinguish his tall form ; but a few minutes later, while Mr. Howard was pointing out to her the famous portrait of the Lady Alice Howard, who had been so noted in the family history of the days of the civil wars, Ellen remarked that a figure detached itself from a group near the fire, and advancing to Lady Warneford, addressed a few words to her. She tried to keep her attention fixed on Mr. Howard's history of his ancestress's gallant defence of the Priory against one of Cromwell's best commanders ; but in spite of herself, her eyes wandered to that slightly bowed figure, which, changed as it was, she easily recognized. He had left Lady Warneford now, he was exchanging words with her husband, and now—yes, now, he was coming towards herself. She half rose to meet him—he came quickly forwards. Neither spoke, but, as if actuated by one influence, each stretched out a hand to the other, and the tight and silent grasp that followed told much that words could not. And then he sat down by her—it was evident he could not stand—and after a moment's silence he said very low, "I am glad we have met at last."

For a few seconds she could not answer ; she could not even see him, for the blinding tears that welled up into her eyes at the sound of that broken but once familiar voice. But it is a woman's earliest lesson to hide the feelings she cannot control, and in a voice whose composure amazed even herself, she answered, "I too am glad, very glad, to meet you *thus*." The force of the last word, and the smile that accompanied it, showed him what she meant.

"Yes," he said, "God has been very good to me—far, far better than I deserve ; and, were this place more fitting, I would tell you how this great change came about, and how much of it I owe to you."

"To me!"—and her heart, which had till now beat calmly, gave a bound of pleasure.

"Do you remember a few lines you sent me on your recovery from illness? I see you do. And those same words that led you to serious thought were made blessed to me also—'Be still, and know that I am God.' Thanks be to Him, we both now feel the full, entire salvation expressed in these few words."

At this moment Mr. Howard approached them. "Mr. Stanhope," he said, "my aunt looks for your arm to assist her to the dining-room. Miss Egerton, may I take you?"

The conversation was soon over; but these few words—what had they not given Ellen of delight and gratitude? They told her they were friends now, in the highest sense of the word; and that she—all unworthy as she was—had been permitted to lend her aid in bringing him to a knowledge of the truth.

During dinner she had more opportunity than hitherto to see really whether he were so much altered as the one short glance of him at the concert had led her to suppose. In church, the exertion of speaking had restored to his countenance much of its former animation,—his eye had kindled, his cheek had gained colour, and his full, rich voice had rolled in volumes of sound through the sacred building. But the glow of holy excitement was wanting now, and she saw that his cheek was pale and hollow, that care had furrowed his broad, white brow, and cut deep lines round his well-formed mouth; and though the expression of both had gained in sweetness and serenity, it was impossible to doubt that it had been acquired through the purifying influence of suffering and sorrow. But the most marked change was in the eyes, those splendid eyes that formerly used to flash and sparkle from under their long lashes at every striking word or thought. Now they were often closed for an instant, as if a heavy pain weighed down the long-fringed lids; and when the once glorious orbs did meet those of others, there was something so softened and holy in their light, that she felt no other test was needed to show the changed nature of the man.

Before the guests separated, Reginald found an opportunity of exchanging a few words with Ellen, in the course of which he thanked her very touchingly, not only for her kindness to

Evelyn, but for her offer to visit Terese. As things were, it was at present impossible. Her illness was of such a nature, that the slightest additional excitement might produce the worst consequences ; but he did not the less feel grateful for her goodwill.

"I do not think," he added, "that my poor wife suffers much, except at long intervals ; but I sometimes regret that my little darling has so melancholy a home. I cannot yet quite realize the certainty that all is ordered more wisely for our welfare than we could order it ourselves. Yet, as it is my duty to do the best I can for her, I try sometimes to procure her indulgences, and am often successful. Howard makes quite a pet of Eva, and as for Lady Warneford's and your kindness to her—God bless you for it."

When once Evelyn's name was mentioned, the conversation flowed easily ; and it was not till the hour of separation had nearly come, that Ellen gained courage to ask whether she might hope to see him again before her departure.

His cheek flushed for an instant, as he said, "I should like it, but fear it is impossible."

"Why?"

"For a very simple reason. I am too feeble now to go as far as Warneford. Why should I hesitate to speak frankly? My race is nearly run. I have still much work to do, and I must not shake the few remaining sands in life's hour-glass by—by unnecessary agitations. Do not look so sad, dear Ellen, when I speak of death as near. It has no terrors for me now, praise be to His holy name who has opened the gate of salvation to all who trust in Him ; and but for one or two clinging thoughts of earth, I would indeed desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. As it is, I try to bring my thoughts into subjection to His will, and to realize the promise that He who is the father of the fatherless, and the husband of the widow, will never forsake them."

"Evelyn has already many friends," Ellen said, with deep emotion.

His face lighted up in a moment. "Will *you* be her friend? Will you forgive all I have made you suffer, and only remember that when her poor mother thought herself on her

death-bed, it was your guardianship she sought for her infant child."

"I never can forget, I never have forgotten, that proof of her friendship," she said eagerly; "and as for the rest, we have both learned that God is able out of the depths of sorrow to bring the greatest, most enduring happiness. I can now, in all sincerity, bless Him for the sufferings which first taught me to know my need of a Saviour."

Reginald made no answer; but the momentary glance of the eye upwards—the faint quiver round the lips—showed how deeply he felt the words she uttered.

"Then farewell," he said, as they rose to depart. "When the time comes I shall remind you of your promise. Till then, God be with you!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE VICARAGE.

"She was become
The queen of a fantastic realm;
Her thoughts
Were combination of fantastic things."
BYRON.

No change could be more complete than from the quietude and regularity of life at Warneford to the turmoil at Egerton Park, where Mrs. Egerton was in the full flow of delight and bustle in superintending Kate's *trousseau*.

Milliners and dressmakers were in attendance morning, noon, and night; silks, satins, velvets, laces were seen in every corner, and poor Mr. Egerton frequently declared, that had he known all the miseries Kate's marriage at home would entail upon him, he would have quietly suggested to Harry to run off with her to Gretna Green, and get it over without all this fuss and nonsense; at which observation, however frequently repeated, Mrs. Egerton was regularly indignant, taking it quite literally, and thinking that really hers was the most

trying of married lives, being afflicted with a husband who cared for nothing that one wished him to care for. And as for Kate, she was nearly as bad as her papa ; for, do what she would, she could not get her to decide whether she would have her marriage dress trimmed with Brussels or Honiton lace.

Ellen was expected to act as peacemaker in these difficult circumstances, and, strange to say, she succeeded in the attempt. By her own patience as a listener, she became the non-conductor to arrest the stream of trifling detail with which Mrs. Egerton had hitherto banished her husband to the library. She prevailed upon Kate to give up one or two rides and walks with Harry, and decide upon the colour and materials of her dresses ; she persuaded Mr. Egerton to yield to his wife's wish to invite forty people to breakfast—"there were thirty at Sybella Silford's marriage"—on condition that the projected ball was given up ; and last, not least, she added to Kate's little fortune such a sum as made Harry and her quite comfortable.

But this last success was only attained at great cost to her own individual feelings. Mr. Egerton had stood out vehemently against her proposal. As one of her principal trustees, he thought himself entitled to withstand her wishes. Suppose she married—as she most probably would some day—how could he answer to her husband for permitting such a step ?

"I shall never marry."

"Nonsense, Ellen ; such a girlish speech is beneath you. You will marry. Your health is now re-established, and you know, as well as I do, that if you speak the word, to-morrow may see you as cherished a bride as Kate."

She shook her head, but made no further answer.

Her father's eye kindled. "You do not really mean, Ellen, that, after having served for you longer than Jacob did for Rachel, you will refuse Frank Vere ? What objection can you have to such a man ? I grant you, he is fifteen or twenty years your senior, but what is that to a sensible woman like you ?"

"That is not my objection," she replied firmly. "I have told Frank my reasons, and he allows their force."

"Be so kind as to tell them to me as well as to Frank," he said, curtly.

"Pray do not urge me, dear father. It is enough that we understand each other."

"No, Miss Egerton, it is not enough," he said, rising from his seat, and pacing up and down the room, as he was accustomed to do when angry. "Frank Vere is to me as a dear son. It has been the dream of my life that he should eventually be in fact what he is only now in affection, and I insist upon knowing why you reject a man who has everything to recommend him to you?"

"There is no one for whom I have a greater esteem and respect than Sir Francis Vere," Ellen said, very calmly, though her heart beat quick at finding herself for the first time in actual antagonism with her father; "no one for whom I have a more sincere friendship. But it cannot be."

"I say it shall be, or else you must give me some more definite reason;" and the old man's eyes flashed, and his nostrils dilated with passion. "There is some mystery here which I cannot fathom. I have suspected it for some time, I am now convinced of it."

Ellen was silent.

"Am I right or wrong, Miss Egerton? Have you no better reason for refusing Frank?"

"None that I can give."

"None that you can give? You aggravate me by this shilly-shallying. Tell me the truth, whatever it is."

"Were I alone concerned, you should have heard all long ago; but the secret is not mine, therefore I cannot tell you."

"You imply that Frank knows it, then why should I, your father, be shut out from a confidence you grant him. Have I ever done anything that deserves this secrecy?"

Had he asked whether he had ever done anything to entitle him to her confidence it had been more to the purpose; but in his anger he forgot that, save in the common outward intercourse of life, he had been little of a father to her, and far less of a friend and companion than Frank Vere had been.

"I await your answer," he said, after a short silence.

"If I could be assured that what I am going to say would draw down your anger on me only," she replied, "I should not hesitate to answer you ; but I have no title to implicate others, even to relieve my own mind—and what a relief it would be to tell you all, God only knows."

He was touched by her reply ; but too proud to yield at once, he answered gruffly, "I can make no stipulations."

"Then I must refuse to comply with your wishes."

Unaccustomed to opposition from his gentle daughter, he stopped suddenly in his walk up and down the room, and was beginning to address her angrily, when his eye was suddenly attracted by her mother's picture, which hung immediately above where she sat. The similarity of expression in Ellen's face and that of the portrait forcibly arrested his attention ; a rush of old recollections came over him, his anger passed away as suddenly as it had arisen, his fiery eye softened, his frowning brow relaxed, and seating himself on the couch near his daughter, he put his arm gently round her, and said—

"You are very like her, my child. Like, both in form and mind. Gentle and yet strong, yielding and yet firm. Would that I had oftener followed her wise teaching—I, both, had been happier."

The sudden burst of emotion affected Ellen exceedingly. Never before had she seen her father so much moved, but she felt that it would not do for her to give way now ; she must bear up to comfort and soothe him ; and by a violent effort she controlled her own agitation, and spoke to him many gentle and affectionate words.

"You are a good child, Ellen," he said, after a short silence, "but I must not let you flatter me. Had I been what I ought, I had never been shut out as I am from my daughter's heart. I do not blame you for your reserve, my child. I have not striven, as perhaps I ought, to gain your confidence, but a punishment is not the less severe because it is merited."

Could any daughter listen to such words from a father's lips and not be touched by them ? Above all, could one so clinging and affectionate by nature as Ellen withhold a confidence so sought ? Impossible. She opened her whole

heart to him, and she never repented yielding to the impulse so to do.

At first, indeed, when he heard what had passed at Heddlesham, his anger was with difficulty controlled, and the words "heartless villain" were growled forth as if from the very depths of his indignation ; but he was on his guard against himself, and resolving to prove himself worthy of Ellen's faith in him, he contrived to restrain his anger within bounds. As the story went on, as he heard how step by step the toils had been wound round Reginald, as he listened to the struggles both had made to flee from temptation, how fatally they had again been brought together, and the circumstances which had induced them to believe their marriage at least justifiable ; when, finally, he heard the end of all, his indignation gave way to pity, his irritable manner to one of gentle sympathy.

For a single moment only he had been tempted to believe that Reginald had deceived Ellen with regard to his own knowledge of Terese's death ; but when he looked on her marble face, whose rigidity alone showed its emotion ; when he listened to her steady voice, whose hollowness alone betrayed how trying it was to revive that terrible past, he felt it was an unworthy suspicion, and that neither he nor she would have swerved from the strictest truth in such a matter. And then, when he listened to her picture of Reginald's present life ; when she painted the woe-worn man, so earnest in his duties, so self-denying in his life, so humble, so hopeful, and yet so sorrowful, his heart melted entirely, the proud man bowed his head and wept bitterly.

Ellen did not weep ; had she done so, her father had not felt it so deeply. It was the very stillness and resignation of that sweet face that touched him ; the simple, unadorned language in which the sad story was told, no vivid descriptions of feeling, no attempt to excite sympathy, but a mere unadorned recital of facts, from which she permitted him to draw his own conclusions.

Perhaps there is nothing more trying to a listener than to hear such a tale so told. Pallid cheeks, tear-swollen eyes, and a voice choked by sobs, are far less affecting, for the very violence displayed gives promise that the emotion will find

relief in outward expression ; but the stillness of grief is very terrible : the dry eye, the steady voice, the cold clasp of the untrembling hand, the statue-like tranquillity of every limb and feature, forces the conviction that this is a sorrow which can never pass away, but is bound up with every thought and feeling of the sufferer. To such, no common consolation can be addressed. Indeed, it seems often as if the relative positions of the parties were reversed, and that the mourner becomes the consoler, not the consoled.

It was so now. Ellen's simple story had opened a new view of his own character to her father. Where had he been, what had he done, not to avert such sorrow from his child ? What parent's duties had he ever performed towards her ? What responsibility had he assumed on her account ? Insensible to her frequent appeals to him to come to her assistance at the time of her grandmother's death, he had substituted less important duties for those essential ones ; or rather he had permitted old painful recollections to get the better of his sense of what was right. And when he did go, and found strangers filling the position he ought to have filled, did he not leave them to complete their task, and thus destroy the only chance of showing Ellen that, in spite of his natural reluctance to re-visit the scene of bitter sorrow, he could forget himself to win his child's confidence and love ?

For many minutes he was silent ; when he spoke again, it was in a tremulous voice.

"My child, this has unmanned me completely. I cannot yet think of it calmly ; but you have won the victory. I shall never again touch on such a subject as I did to-day. Frank is a noble fellow, and Mary a true friend. God bless them both."

From that time a change came over Mr. Egerton. He made Ellen more and more of his companion, and all around him soon perceived that the quiet influence of a thoroughly pious and gentle woman was becoming effectual.

He would have resisted any self-evident attempt to improve him, but he found pleasure in listening to her soft, low voice, breathing into his ear the high and holy things which hitherto he had too much neglected ; and though he

sometimes pretended that he must resist becoming what Kate was accustomed to call "chicken-pecked," and playfully announced his determination that he would not do such and such things, which his daughter asked of him, it became daily more evident that the change so suddenly begun was likely to be carried out gradually but consistently, and that the hot-tempered, fiery man was daily learning more of the effectual power of gentleness and goodness.

The change, however, was not accomplished all at once. Before Kate's marriage festivities were at an end, more than one burst of irritation took place; and so utterly was he fretted by the follies in which his wife indulged on the occasion, that but for Ellen he had made himself and her ridiculous. But the grand affair was over at last. The happy couple returned from their marriage tour; the round of dinners that followed were gone through; and while Mr. Egerton paid his first visit to Chevely, Ellen and her father agreed to refresh themselves by one visit to Penmorfa. Penmorfa! Yes, Mr. Egerton was resolved to go thither, and endeavour to efface, by new recollections, the painful images of the past.

"Call it a penance, if you will, dear Ellen," he said, on telling her of his determination; "but there are some penances in this life which we must undergo before we can convince ourselves that we are as much altered in reality as we are in appearance. Besides, I have long promised Mary Beaumont a visit; and after that is paid, we shall proceed to Warneford, and—— Well, well, the rest will come. Let our first resting-place be Penmorfa."

Ellen agreed very willingly; the more so, as in her secret heart she believed that one motive of her father's proposed visit to Warneford was to see Reginald. Oh! that that might be his wish! But a serious disappointment awaited her with regard to this one point of peculiar interest. The Warnefords were gone from home, and were to be absent some months.

Ellen put the letter into her father's hand. "I fear our whole plan cannot be carried out," she said.

He read the letter and looked very grave. "Not as we wished," he answered; "still the postscript inclines me to

go first in that direction. The poor fellow may care to have some friend near him."

"The postscript?" and glancing at the turn-over of the letter, she found these words: "I am sorry we have to leave just at present; for I have heard this morning very sad accounts of poor Mr. Stanhope. The doctor of Arden tells me he is in a rapid decline, the effect of over-work and anxiety of mind. Did you know, for I did not till to-day, that his wife is a confirmed maniac? This accounts for much that puzzled us all in his strange seclusion."

"I am resolved to go to Arden," Mr. Egerton said decidedly. "He may want many comforts if the Warnefords are absent."

Ellen silently thanked him, and hurried away to complete her preparations for her departure. The next morning's post brought another letter, which made them resolve to make Arden their first point instead of the last. It was from Reginald himself.

"Ellen, the time of which I spoke is come, and I dare to claim your promise to befriend my poor child. It has been the great aim of the last few years of my life to secure for her and her mother enough to save them from abject poverty, but that is all I have been able to effect. They are above want, and I have made my good friends, Howard and Vere, their trustees and guardians. I know their friendship will accept the responsibility, but it is a woman's love I crave for my dear child, and that I claim from you, my oldest, dearest friend. I am too weak to write more; but I know that, at whatever inconvenience to yourself, you will come to Arden, and receive the sacred trust from my hands before I die. It would relieve me of my greatest earthly anxiety to see you once more, to commit my little darling to your care, and once again to seek forgiveness of my faults towards you, as I humbly hope I may, for our dear Saviour's sake, receive the forgiveness of God for all my sins towards Him.

"I would have told you of Terese, but this heavy pain forbids the exertion. May God bless you, dear old friend, and enable you to fulfil faithfully the great responsibility I impose upon you.

"R. S."

Blinding tears, and the tremulous characters in which this letter was written, made it difficult for Ellen to decipher its contents. When she did so, she hesitated not one instant before carrying it to her father.

He read it with deep emotion. "Let us go to him at once, Ellen. I shall arrange it all, my love, with Mrs. Egerton. We shall start in an hour."

Oh, what thankfulness did she experience that her path was made so easy for her, that no difficulties, no concealments now prevented her from at once seeking her father, and entreating his assistance.

That very afternoon they reached Arden.

The village doctor had just returned from the Vicarage when Mr. Egerton went to ask his opinion of Reginald. He told him that Mr. Stanhope had rallied slightly within the last few hours; but there was no material improvement in his condition, and though he might linger for a day or two, he scarcely expected him to weather out four-and-twenty hours.

"When would it be prudent for him to see us?" Mr. Egerton asked.

"If you are the old friends Mr. Stanhope expected," said the doctor, hesitatingly, "I should say the sooner the better. Especially if you can relieve his mind as to his wife and child. I know he has sent for Mr. Howard; but he is in Paris, and I doubt will arrive too late."

"We come at Mr. Stanhope's request," Mr. Egerton replied, very gravely.

"In that case, sir, I should propose your visiting him to-night. His sole chance of life is to have his mind put at ease with regard to the future of these two poor things. Suspense is the most trying thing for an excitable man, as he evidently is, though it is marvellous how well he bears up against adverse circumstances. It makes even me give way sometimes to see the beautiful Christian spirit in which he takes everything. They say that medical men's feelings get blunted by the sight of much misery. I don't think it—at least, not to see such misery so borne. It is impossible not to regret the early death of such a man."

"The sword has proved too sharp for the scabbard, I fear," said Mr. Egerton.

"In truth it has, sir. He is utterly worn out by the wear and tear of brain and heart work. He never would spare himself in anything. 'Better wear out than rust out,' he used to say. He rust out! Impossible! He was far too sensitive for his position, poor fellow; that was his worst failing, if it were a failing. It was not his fault that his wife was mad, but it was quite wrong, to my thinking, to make himself her keeper. Not that she was often violent, poor thing. Oh, dear no! but to a man like that it was more than he could bear to see her poor mind, 'like sweet bells, jangled out of tune.' But perhaps," he added, suddenly turning to Ellen, who had hitherto sat silent, with her veil drawn over her face, listening to the good-hearted gossiping man,—*"but perhaps the lady was not aware of Mrs. Stanhope's state. It has been, I believe, carefully concealed from his friends; but when Mr. Howard left, and Mr. Stanhope got so suddenly worse, I felt it my duty, sir, to tell Lady Warneford the truth, and her ladyship——"*

"Lady Warneford informed my—informed us of Mrs. Stanhope's state," Mr. Egerton answered, rather formally; "till then we were unaware of it. Indeed, a long absence abroad left us in ignorance of Mr. Stanhope's present position."

"Ah, sir, I thought so. I was certain that if his friends were aware of it——But I talk too much; perhaps I had better precede you to the Rectory."

"I shall be obliged to you. We shall follow you immediately. If you will give Mr. Stanhope this letter, it will inform him of the reasons of our coming so suddenly upon him."

"If you would not object to accompany me, sir, it would perhaps save time; and time is of great importance in this case."

Mr. Egerton turned anxiously to Ellen. "My love," he whispered, "can you, without rest, make this exertion?"

"Indeed I can;" and the firm voice and calm composure of her countenance showed she had fully prepared herself for *all*. Still it startled her, when, after talking away for some

time on comparatively indifferent subjects, Dr. Wilcox suddenly asked her whether she should object to see Mrs. Stanhope. It would do the poor thing a world of good to have some new object of interest just now; and, if the lady were an old acquaintance, it was just possible that seeing her might turn the course of her ideas, and so spare her husband from some of the pain he endured in consequence of her present delusion. It was a very strange one. She fancied that Mr. Stanhope had been wounded in a duel, and that they tried to keep her away from him, so that they were obliged to let her go to his room often when he would be far better without her;—her husband insisted she should have no constraint put upon her save what was actually necessary. But sometimes it really was too much for him to have to listen to her strange, wild, loving talk; to hear her call him by a thousand pet names, and then suddenly invoke curses on his murderer. “So, ma’am, if you could but make up your mind to see her, it might do good, and there is not the slightest danger, nor anything in the least disagreeable. Miss Evelyn is with her constantly.”

Mr. Egerton entreated Ellen to delay this trying visit till the next day; but as it had been decided that her father should first see Reginald, and make all necessary arrangements for the future welfare of Terese and Evelyn, Ellen believed, and perhaps wisely, that it would distract her thoughts from dwelling on that trying interview if she were occupied in the way Dr. Wilcox suggested.

“I assure you,” he reiterated, “there is nothing painful to apprehend. Indeed, if one did not know the truth——”

“I shall go,” said Ellen; and the doctor said no more on that subject; but he was one who could not keep silence entirely, and as they proceeded up the long gravel walk which had so attracted Mrs. Dashwood and Ellen’s attention on the day of their first expedition to Arden Church, he talked continually of Reginald,—of the wonderful amount of good he had contrived to do in the space of his short ministry,—of the affection with which he had inspired his flock; and gave innumerable touching traits of the goodwill which his patience, charity, and simple piety had drawn from a most undemonstrative people.

They reached the Rectory, which now, illumined by the summer sunset, seemed far less gloomy than it had appeared in the depth of winter. Roses and jasmines were flinging their long straggling branches over the high palisade; birds were singing in the fine old trees behind the house; and the soft low tones of the curfew bell of Warneford floated on the evening breeze. There was, however, nothing inviting in the interior aspect of the house. Dr. Wilcox ushered them into a very small parlour, the only one apparently that opened from the little hall, and begged them to wait there for a few moments until he communicated the news of their arrival to Mr. Stanhope.

The room betrayed every evidence of poverty. The windows were uncurtained, the floor uncarpeted, a table and a couple of chairs were its only furniture, and the empty grate, even on that summer evening, looked cheerless and uncomfortable in its black, shining nakedness. Both sat silent waiting for the doctor's return, and comparing in their own minds this miserable room with the former tastes and pursuits of its master; but a few moments only elapsed ere this stillness was broken by the sounds of a harp played in an adjoining apartment. Music at such a time, and in such a place, was startling to hear; yet it was no unskilled hand that touched the instrument, no untaught voice that poured forth the wild lament of Chatterton's—

“O sing unto my roundelay;”

but when the singer reached the words—

“My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree,”—

she broke off abruptly, and a deep silence succeeded. It was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the appearance of the old servant whom Ellen had twice seen with Evelyn.

She came up to her, and respectfully informed her that Dr. Wilcox had told Miss Evelyn of her arrival, and that Mrs. Stanhope would be glad to see her if she were inclined to visit her.

Ellen rose at once, and followed her out of the room. The

servant stopped outside the door to ask her whether she were prepared to find her mistress much changed.

"I remember seeing you often with Mrs. Stanhope at Heddlesham," she said; "but perhaps you are not aware——"

"Yes, yes," she answered quickly, as if afraid to give herself time to think; "I know all; and I think I recognize you now. You are Mrs. Blake, are you not? How stupid I was not to remember your face when we met in church."

"Ah, ma'am, you were thinking of other things then," she answered simply. "But I am glad, for Miss Evelyn's sake and master's, that you are come."

At this moment Dr. Wilcox came up to them. "Ah! you are going to visit Mrs. Stanhope? That's right. I heard the harp; so you have nothing to dread,—nothing. I have just left poor Mr. Stanhope. The letter agitated him a little; but he will see Mr. Egerton by-and-by. Mrs. Blake will tell him when. I myself cannot, as I should have liked, remain longer. Medical men have not everything in their own power. Good evening, ma'am. I am glad you came—very glad;" and the busy doctor passed on.

Ellen, led by Mrs. Blake, continued along a broad passage, which conducted them to a door at the other end of the house from that by which they had entered; so that while the room into which it opened adjoined the little parlour she had just quitted, the entrances were far apart.

Mrs. Blake paused an instant before unclosing the inner door, through which Evelyn's childish voice was heard, assuring some one they would come very soon now. Blake had been gone scarce two minutes.

"She expects you, Miss Egerton, and you really have nothing to dread; only be as calm and composed as you can." So saying, she opened the door, and Ellen stood in Terese's apartment.

Nothing could form a greater contrast than it did with the little parlour. Books, flowers, and musical instruments were scattered around in gay confusion, while the bright-coloured chintz furniture, the delicate tinted paper of the room, the full white muslin curtains, and a thousand comforts and luxuries,—among others, a magnificent mirror and splendid

Erard's harp,—were gathered together to soften the affliction of its mistress.

Terese was reclining on a sofa near one of the windows, amusing herself with twining some luxuriant creeping plants over the wire-work lattice, which was placed as much for defence as ornament over the lower panes of the long, low window. Thus occupied she looked very beautiful, but painfully unlike one who might so soon be a widow. Her dress was rich in texture and colouring, bespeaking a studied but fanciful taste. Her splendid black hair was carefully arranged in long, thick curls over her neck and shoulders, and gave an air of girlishness to a face from which Time had not stolen a single grace save that of intellect. It seemed as if his remorseless hand had been arrested in the work of change by the absence of reason, in that fair, young, beautiful face.

Evelyn sat on a low stool at her mother's feet, her eyes fixed upon her with the tender anxiety with which a nurse watches a froward child; but when the door opened and her dear Miss Egerton entered, she sprang to her feet, exclaiming,—“Oh, aunt Ellen, you have come at last! Thank God! thank God!”

The simple, heartfelt words were almost more than Ellen could endure just then; but catching the little darling in her arms, she covered her with kisses, and endeavoured by silent prayer to gain strength for what she had to undergo.

“She is come, mamma, she is come,” Evelyn repeated, laying her hand on her mother's shoulder.

Terese turned round with a pettish “Pshaw!” but when she saw Ellen, she gave a loud shriek of joy, and springing towards her clasped her in a close embrace.

“I knew you would not desert me,” she exclaimed; “but oh, how I have pined for your return. It seemed so very long since we met. But you are here, and all is well.” And motioning to her to seat herself on the couch from which she herself had just risen, she flung herself on the floor at her side, and drawing Ellen's arm round her neck, nestled herself close to her knee, and in touching accents recounted all she had felt and suffered during her husband's illness; and though she spoke of him as Sidney, and Ellen as Madeline, her whole conversation was otherwise so rational, that Ellen could

scarcely persuade herself that her intellect was entirely gone. This mood, however, did not last long ; she turned in an instant from this pathetic theme to others the most trivial, and with the teardrops still on her eyelashes, laughed and jested with a mirth that chilled her listener's heart, and then broke from her gay sallies into snatches of melody, for which she demanded Ellen's admiration.

A little later a new idea seized upon her ; she went to her harp, tuned it carefully, placed the music-stool before it, and then going up to Ellen said with stately courtesy,—

"Now, lady, it is for you to sing ; I have done my part. I wish to be sung to sleep. It is pleasant to sleep to music. Any sweet lullaby will satisfy me. Do you remember this one ?" And she began a mournful melody which Ellen had never heard before. "Forgotten it ? Well, what you will, so it be sweet and sad." She threw herself on the couch from which Ellen had risen, and motioned her to seat herself at the harp.

Little Evelyn whispered, "Oh, if you can, aunt Ellen, do sing ;—it makes her so good."

Ellen hesitated no longer, and had already laid her hand on the strings, when Terese again sprang to her feet.

"Madeline, how silly you are. Have you forgotten all my favourites ? Listen ! I shall sing some of them." She pushed her aside, sat down, and leaning her head against the harp, seemed as if trying to recall some half-forgotten strain. Nothing could be more beautiful, more pathetic than the picture she presented at the moment.

The last rays of sunset lighted up the pretty, cheerful room, and shed a golden glory on the graceful figure, with its rich dress and raven tresses, leaning against the pillar of her instrument ; and when the inspiration came, when the swan-like neck was raised, the fair head flung slightly back, the red lips unclosed, the large eyes raised to heaven, and the round white arm escaped from its falling drapery, as the little hand swept across the strings, she looked more like an inspired sybil, than a shattered, heartbroken woman. Seemingly unconscious of Ellen's presence, her fingers lightly touched the chords, and her glorious voice rolled forth its volume of sound, in the wild, sad melody Sidney had given

her. When the lament ended, the harp glided from her grasp, and once more flinging herself on the couch, she burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

"Sing, aunt Ellen,—do sing," whispered the child. Ellen obeyed, she knew not how. Her voice trembled as she attempted the first few notes ; but gradually the power over it came back to her ; the effort, however, seemed made in vain, Terese still wept on. At last Ellen remembered a discussion she had heard at Warneford on the influence produced on the insane by music, associated with incidents that had occurred before they were attacked by their fell disease ; and it occurred to her to try the effect of Amina's song to her violets, of which Terese had formerly been so fond.

The result was marvellous. Hardly had she struck the opening chords, when Terese seemed to rouse herself from her stupor of grief, her sobs gradually ceased, her tears stopped,—she raised herself on her arm, drank in with delight the once loved sounds,—a gentle melancholy stole over her, and breathing a deep, long-drawn sigh, she sank back on the cushions, as if to enjoy in perfection a pleasure of which she had long been deprived. Before the strain was ended, she had fallen into a tranquil sleep. Tears still glistened on her eyelashes, but she slept quietly, more like a child who has wept itself to sleep than a woman who had undergone the joys and sorrows of riper years, who had seen every hope blighted, and whose mind had given way under its load of grief.

Evelyn crept up to Ellen. "You must go now, dear auntie ; but come again soon. Good night ;" and she held up her rosy lips to be kissed. Ellen clasped her once more to her heart, breathed a fervent "God bless you, darling," and stole out of the room.

CHAPTER XLVL

THE LAST MEETING.

"In that fell hour I saw him. I had dreaded
 The anguish of that soul check'd in its might,
 The passionate longing for fresh life, and horror
 Of the dark coming and mysterious night ;
 But all was calm and deep ; and strong reliance
 Upon God's goodness, mix'd with the desire
 To know the mighty secret of our being,
 And to draw near to our eternal Sire,
 Had superseded all the earnest craving
 Which once was his.

* * * * *

Who has not caught from dying lips and glaucous
 An impulse winning him to thoughts more true,
 And deeds more sacrificing, pure, and tender,
 Than till that hour he ever dream'd or knew."

THE STUDENT'S GRAVE.

VERY different was the scene that, meanwhile, had taken place between Reginald and Mr. Egerton. The sick man's study was more like the little parlour into which they had first been ushered than Terese's drawing-room. A few rough bookshelves held his well-worn books, a square table covered with papers stood in the middle of the room, one or two deal chairs, and a black hair-cloth sofa were all its furniture—its only ornament, a sketch of his mother, which Reginald had painted from memory. The invalid attempted to rise to receive Mr. Egerton, but sank back from extreme weakness, his pale face growing more ghastly from the vain effort, and his hand trembling as he endeavoured to stretch it out to him, murmuring the while, "I did not expect, I did not deserve this kindness from you."

No man could, when he pleased, be more considerate and kind than Mr. Egerton, and, touched by his old favourite's present condition, and by all that he had heard of his sad story, he forgot how Ellen's sufferings had arisen from her acquaintance with him, and hastened to comfort and console

him with every assurance of sympathy and regard. When he saw him a little recovered from his first agitation, he proceeded to tell him what plans Ellen and he had formed for the comfort of Terese and Evelyn. Penmorfa should be their home, Mrs. Blake their attendant, and neither should ever want protection or comforts while he or Ellen lived.

Reginald stretched out his emaciated hand, and clasping his friend's, said, in a broken voice, "I shall not attempt to thank you for this kindness; I leave that to Heaven, and to the feelings of your own heart."

"But, my dear boy, is there no hope that you yourself may so far recover as to——"

He interrupted him at once. "Impossible, it cannot be. And now, now when they are to be in such good hands, I do not wish it. I had but that one earthly anxiety—it is gone, and now my earnest desire is to be with Him, by whose saving mercy my weary pilgrimage has been made so tolerable, my future hopes so inexpressibly delightful." And as he spoke, his dim eyes were raised to heaven, and his lips moved gently as if in prayer.

Mr. Egerton sat gazing at him in mournful silence, recalling the gay and handsome Reginald he had so loved and admired a few years since, and tracing the ravages disease and sorrow had made in him; and as he marked the hollowness of his cheek, the transparency of his hands, and the dimness of his once brilliant eyes, he felt that his hours were numbered indeed, and he made no further mention of earthly hope for him. But they talked long and earnestly of his child's future. He listened to his wishes for her, and promised that as far as human efforts could go, they should be fulfilled.

And then Reginald begged to see Ellen. "I desire once again to hear her tell me she forgives me—I know she does in her heart, but to hear it is so pleasant."

"My boy, you were more sinned against than sinning, and nobly have you redeemed your error."

A faint flush rose to Reginald's cheek at these words. "Do not say that, I beseech you," he exclaimed, in great agitation. "As I look back now and trace the course of my life, I see it in a new light. Well, indeed, may I say of

my misdoings in the words of our prayer-book, the remembrance of them is grievous, the burden of them is intolerable ; but, thanks be to God, there is another than I to redeem my errors ; on His mercy, on His salvation alone I trust."

"I did not mean to pain you, Reginald," said the other, humbly ; "these subjects are yet new to me. I spoke after the manner of the world, though I shall never forget the lesson you have just given me. I hear Ellen's step. Farewell ; I shall leave you alone together."

Of the words that passed in the last interview between the two who had been so strangely bound together, so strangely dissevered, we dare not speak. It was a scene too sad, too solemn for description ; but ere they parted he said to her, "There is still so much of earth clinging to me, Ellen, that in all my wanderings, wherever I was, whatever I did, I never was without this ring you gave me when we parted at Penmorfa. Will you take it again, and wear it in memory of the past—not of me so much as of the lesson we both have learned, that God is able to bring good out of *any* evil ?"

He took her hand in his as he said this, and was about to place the "talisman" diamond on her finger, when suddenly altering his intention, he dropped the right hand and took the left.

"I feared this might be the case," he said, almost in a whisper ; "I feared this token was not destroyed, this bond not broken. It must be so now. You must try, Ellen, to think of me *only* as a friend ;" and gently drawing the marriage-ring from her finger, he placed the diamond in its stead. Then, raising the hand to his lips, he murmured, "And now, Ellen, farewell ; may God render to you a thousandfold the good you have bestowed on me !"

She uttered a scarce audible adieu, and turned to leave the room ; but when she reached the threshold, she stopped to take one long last look. He lay there, still and pale as death ; his thin hands folded together, his melancholy eyes fixed tearfully on her retiring form. She could not thus part from him, and hastily retracing her steps, she flung herself on her knees beside him, and breathed a fervent heartfelt petition for mercy on his parting soul. As she bowed

herself in prayer, a tear fell on her neck, while a hand was laid gently in benediction on her head.

She rose, strengthened by the holy words, and whispered, "Farewell, Reginald ; farewell, for ever."

"Not for ever, God in his mercy grant ! This life is passing away ; but oh ! may our purified souls meet in that which is to come."

And thus they parted ; and who can blame them that it was thus, and not more calmly ?

It were sacrilege to attempt to describe the scenes that followed. Terese's passionate grief, little Evelyn's childish sorrow, and Ellen's—more quiet and undemonstrative—but oh, how bitter ! On her fell many a trying duty, which no one else had courage to perform. Among them that of leading the worse than orphan to the chamber of death. It was in such a season as this that the full beauty and strength of her character were discoverable. Forgetting herself, she thought only of others, especially of Evelyn ; and believing that in after-years it would be a blessing to the young child to have such a picture of peace and tranquillity associated with her father and with death, she did not shrink from the pain and suffering it entailed upon herself.

It was Evelyn's own earnest wish to see her father once more. It was to him alone that she had been accustomed to look with a child's reverence and love. He had been her ideal of perfection ;—all that had made her young life's happiness was centred in him ; and she could not convince herself that he was gone for ever.

They entered. Ellen took the young mourner in her arms, and together they gazed on the peaceful face of him they had both loved so dearly. Oh ! how the first sight of death clings to the memory ! How impressive its solemnity ; how strangely soothing its perfect peace.

Evelyn bowed forward, till her long hair fell round the pale face of the corpse, and for an instant gave a shade, a momentary expression of life, to his countenance. She pressed her lips to his cheek, and then, starting back, sank trembling into Ellen's arms, and hid her face in her bosom.

"My poor child," Ellen whispered to her, "you will never forget this night. You will never forget that it was his wish that you should live with me and be my child?"

Evelyn answered only by her sobs; but she clasped her arms round Ellen's neck, and laid her cheek close to hers. She pressed her fondly to her heart, and making her kneel down by her, she passed her arm round her, and prayed earnestly that she might be enabled to take the place of a parent to the desolate child.

When Evelyn quitted the room, Ellen still lingered to gaze, for the last time, on the face of the dead.

The countenance was peaceful now; the lines seemed less rigid; a sweet smile lingered round the pale lips; a heavenly serenity rested on the late troubled brow; the passions that had agitated him in life were at rest; the fiery Reginald lay an image of deep and holy repose.

Ellen leaned over the couch; the burning heat of her eyeballs was at last quenched in tears. How different, how infinitely less bitter are those afflictions which come straight from the hand of God than those which are inflicted through the agency of man! The first is grief, the second is too often agony.

"Father," she exclaimed, "have mercy upon me. Watch over this feeble spirit. Let me not again raise an idol in my heart. Let me love this child; but not with a blind affection: teach me to guide her in thy paths; to curb her passions, so that they may not, as mine have done, cling to the creature forgetful of the Creator."

When this short ejaculation was ended, she stooped down, imprinted a first and last kiss on the cold marble brow, and thus, in presence only of the dead, did she seal her vow to protect his child.

According to the expressed wishes of the deceased, his funeral was strictly private, attended only by his poorer parishioners; but there was not a dry eye in the whole assembly as their beloved pastor was laid in his narrow grave. His short ministry had been one of love; and often in after-years did the elders of the parish linger in the churchyard, and, pointing to the marble slab which marked

his lonely resting-place, tell their children of the grief his death had caused, and mourn that one so good had been cut off in the flower of his age in the midst of his usefulness.

How often is this lament made! How frequently does the world wonder why one is taken, and another left; one apparently a most valuable instrument for good, the other perhaps as pre-eminent in evil. It forgets that here we only see as in a glass darkly; that an allwise Almighty Judge holds the balance of life and death; and that whatever may appear to us, death always comes at the very moment when it is best that it should come, both for those who go and those who remain.

It was very touchingly said by one whose own life was of the shortest,—

“We may feel sure that each lives to do exactly the work he is intended for; and that it is not length of days, but earnestness of purpose, in whatever he has to do, that makes a man’s life complete. I like this better than to say a man dies because he is ripe for heaven, for that, I think, savours of want of charity to those who remain.”*

CONCLUSION.

“O fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long,—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.”

LONGFELLOW.

YEARS passed.

It was a lovely evening in July. The extreme heat of the day had been followed by delicious coolness; for as the sun went down, a gentle breeze had risen, and wafted a few soft fleecy clouds across the summer sky. A flood of glory lighted up the pretty fishing village opposite Penmorfa, and shed a crimson light on the dark beeches and fir-trees beneath which the river rolled along in all the magnificence of a full spring tide.

* “Memoir of Francis Lewis Mackenzie.”

The breath of evening was heavy with the perfume of roses and mignonette from the upper garden before the house; the green leaves rustled refreshingly in answer to the west wind's warning; while the merry voices of children rose from the lower garden, and made the air vocal with their mirth. A group of ladies and gentlemen stood on the quaint little terrace, watching the sports of the riotous party who gambolled on the lawn. Can that be Lady Warneford leaning on the stone balustrade, and holding a child in her arms? Who that saw the motherly glance of her eyes on her baby, or watched the eager interest she took in her elder child's game of romps with his uncle Harry, would accuse her now of dislike to children? Ah! there is Mary Beaumont! How sweet is the expression of her fair face. And her brother Frank, is he here? Yes; the midsummer party at Penmorfa would want its merriest member if Sir Francis did not come.

A fairy figure springs lightly down the broad steps of the terrace, and mingling with the childish throng, whispers a few words to the tallest and most womanly of the youngsters. Gently have years fallen on Kate Dashwood, though three of those little prattlers, who now cling round her, are her children.

But who is the tall, graceful girl whom she addressed, and who so hastily sprang up from the grass, where she had been permitting her younger companions to smother her with flowers? How beautiful she is—what a noble brow—what a flood of intellect seems to flash from her deep dark eyes. One of her little playmates snatches her cottage bonnet from her head, and as a cloud of dark curls falls round her oval face, no one could fail to recognize in her the daughter of Terese and Reginald Stanhope. She stayed not to recover her bonnet, but, laughingly shaking her head at the young culprit, bounded up the terrace steps and disappeared into the house. She soon returned, with Mr. Egerton leaning on her arm.

"May not I stay with grand-papa, aunt Ellen?" she said, looking fondly in her face, as she led him to his accustomed rustic seat, and threw her arm round him with all the confidence of a daughter's affection.

Where was Terese in this gay group? Her sorrows had long been ended, and with her last breath she confided her child to the guardianship of her beloved *Madeline*; and Evelyn is the blessing of one who is the blessing of all. When the midsummer party assembles annually at Penmorfa,—when the happy mothers gaze with rapture on their children, aunt Ellen clasps Evelyn to her heart, and thanks Heaven that she too has a daughter in affection,—she too has pride in her adopted child. Dear aunt Ellen is universally loved and admired, and people have long since given up their expressions of astonishment that she should still be single—it would never do to add new duties to those she has so long fulfilled to all around her. She is still beautiful; and the many claims she now has on her affection have effaced from her countenance the expression of sorrow which used to shade it in earlier life.

Few, very few have an idea of the real history of aunt Ellen's youth. At first there were some speculations on the deep mourning she wore for Reginald; but the presence of his widow and child were an almost sufficient solution of the mystery. At any rate that has been long forgotten; and those who have profited by her sympathy and consolation in affliction have often expressed their surprise at the depth of her knowledge of the human heart. They suppose it a natural gift; and, forgetting that nothing in this world is perfected without suffering, never dream of the fiery ordeal through which that gift was won. It never occurs to them that she suffered, as too many women suffer, from misplaced, concealed, or blighted affections; for, instead of making herself and others miserable by useless repinings, she has had the happiness of turning her sufferings to the good of herself and others, and of learning—

"There is never sorrow of heart that shall lack a precious end,
If but to God we turn and ask of Him to be our friend."

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